

Australian Consumers' Association

December 1993

CHOICE

TASTES OF SUMMER

WINE

Quality in a
two-litre cask

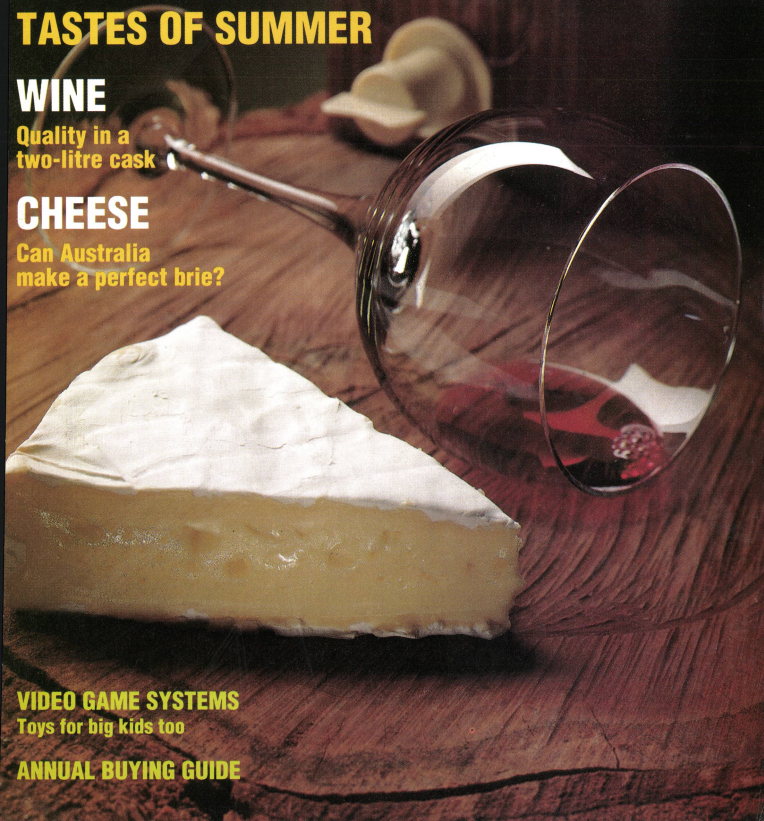
CHEESE

Can Australia
make a perfect brie?

VIDEO GAME SYSTEMS

Toys for big kids too

ANNUAL BUYING GUIDE



CHOICE

The magazine of the Australian Consumers' Association ACN 000 281 925

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CHOICE is published by the Australian Consumers' Association (ACA), an independent, non-profit, non-party-political organisation. The Consumers' Association is funded solely through subscriptions to its magazines, sales of its books, and some fee-for-service testing. We aim to provide consumers with information and guidance about goods and services. In addition we seek to represent and lobby on behalf of consumers to balance the influence of manufacturers and service providers.

All products tested for CHOICE are bought randomly in the marketplace and no samples are accepted. Evaluations are based on tests, trials and expert judgments as appropriate. These findings should not be applied to models other than those nominated in CHOICE. We do not necessarily evaluate every available product or service in a particular class. We check the results of our tests just before publication with manufacturers, but specifications and quality may vary. If this issue is no longer current, check with us or the manufacturer/service provider to determine if important changes to models or services have taken place before you buy. If, despite our extensive checking, a mistake slips through, we will publish a correction as soon as possible.

Ratings and conclusions are solely for subscribers to CHOICE. No information in CHOICE may be used in advertising or for any promotional purpose, and the Consumers' Association will take all possible steps to prevent such use of its material, its name and the name of CHOICE.

The Association is governed by an honorary council elected by the voting members. (For information about voting membership please contact our Information Service on (02) 559 9855.) Members of the Council give their time without reimbursement, and are not engaged as principals in industry, advertising or sales.

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Editorial

IN SEPTEMBER I took up the position of Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Consumers' Association, having previously been Manager of our Policy and Public Affairs Department.

It is an honour to be chosen by the Consumers' Association's Council to head Australia's premier consumer organisation. Some people say the battles in consumer affairs have all been won — that consumers are now well protected by governments and well served by industry. If only it were true!

The reality is that governments are still very lax in many areas of consumer protection and are now making marketplace transactions more complex for consumers by policies such as deregulating financial services and privatising the utilities like water, electricity or phone services. And while the quality of many products and services has increased, many are still substandard and it's only their marketing that has improved.

As a consumer, I for one feel happier that there is a strong, independent Consumers' Association which investigates consumer issues, defends the consumer's interest publicly and researches products and services in ways I could not do as an individual. In addition it makes this information available to all consumers in a useful and accessible way.

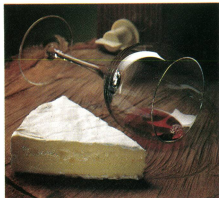
And our independence — we accept no advertising in any of our products, no goods or services from industry and no ongoing funding from any government — means there is only one perspective that can influence us: the consumer's.

We all aim to strengthen the Consumers' Association by improving our work for you, looking at new ways of providing independent advice and information, and continuing our strong advocacy role for consumers. Please feel free to write to me with your suggestions.

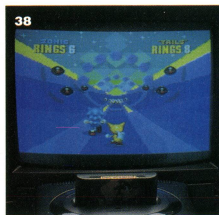
I'd also like to wish each of you, on behalf of the staff and Council of the Consumers' Association, a safe, joy-filled and consumer-friendly Christmas.



Louise Sylvan
Chief Executive Officer



Cover photo: Kent Mears

**Next issue**

Car CD players, car security locks, breakfast cereals, blenders, domestic air travel, tips on buying a sofa bed, dental care.

February, March, April

Tests: Which cars are most reliable — the results of our survey, fridges, toasters, binoculars, clothes dryers, personal alarm systems, microwave ovens, takeaway fast food.

Features: Extended warranties for cars, how private is personal information?, dealing with pets' fleas, buying Australian, real estate fees, investment options, how to choose carpet, charities, near-monopolies, car roadworthiness, setting pollution standards, services for carers.

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To help out with your Christmas shopping or the January sales we look back at the best products from the past year's tests.

24 You and your dentist

Dental health has improved markedly in the last two decades, but most people still shrink from the thought of a visit to the dentist — often because of the price as well as the pain. We examine the state of play in dental care in Australia.

Tests**13 Two-litre wines: time is tight**

We tell you which two-litre casks to buy to get good-quality wine — but check the packing date before you buy: wine in casks doesn't improve with age.

18 In search of the perfect brie

Can Australia make a great brie? The experts were dubious — but check out the winner in our taste test for a surprise.

38 Video game systems

Among teenagers the battle is between Sega and Nintendo, but big kids with money to spend can get more sophisticated systems with better graphics and sound.

42 Keeping the odd drop cool — small drinks coolers

Some coolers keep your drinks cold for significantly longer than others — we tell you which ones.

**Departments****4 Choice Cuts**

Billboard in space; TV makes kids fat; best pensioner deeming accounts; check your child's Jolly Jumper; swimming caps warning; fibre optic telecommunications — the future calling; first results from our telecommunications survey.

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Rainforest adventures on computer; Germany's Green Dot scheme almost collapses; green clothing.

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Passenger airbags — a few safety points to bear in mind.

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Patients in Australia have very few legally defined rights, but you don't have to be completely at the mercy of the system.

41 Shopping Around

Read all about it — the prices of a paperback novel, a quality newspaper, *Time* magazine and a year's subscription to a consumer magazine around the world.

46 Letters

Plumbers' prices; logging native forests; Austel not Telecom; left-handed hazards.

47 What do you know?

Test yourself with our regular consumer quiz.



CHOICE CUTS

Advertising

BILLBOARD IN SPACE

STARGAZERS watch out: a US-based advertising company wants to spoil your view. Space Marketing Inc announced earlier this year it would launch an inflatable billboard into space in 1996, large enough to carry corporate logos which would appear about the size of the moon from earth.

Consumer and environmental groups have been up in arms since the announcement, roundly condemning the idea. According to a report in the American magazine *Adbusters Quarterly*, they appear to be winning some concessions.

Space Marketing has said the billboard will now not be used for advertising, but will carry an environmental message or symbol that sponsors can use on product packaging instead. It also claims scientific instruments to monitor the ozone layer will be attached to the



billboard. And as it burns up on re-entering the earth's atmosphere after only 20 days in space, it will also release a small amount of gas which will help reverse ozone depletion!

Not surprisingly, this hasn't quelled opposition. While, according to some, the company may be just floating the idea, more for self-publicity than anything else, it still claims to be going ahead with it. Here's hoping it never gets off the ground!

Finance

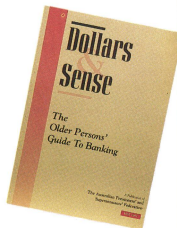
DOLLARS AND SENSE

THE Australian Pensioners' and Superannuants' Federation recently published the biggest-ever study of pensioner 'deeming' bank accounts — accounts which meet the Department of Social Security (DSS) deeming requirements. Under the deeming provisions, any savings a pensioner has over \$2000 will be deemed to be earning an interest rate set by the DSS for the purpose of means-testing income to determine pension payments. That rate is currently set at 4%. So if a pensioner had money in the bank earning, say, 2% he or she would be better off in a deeming account — the DSS would treat their 2% as 4% anyway. The Pensioners' and Superannuants' Federation's publication *Dollars and Sense* gives information on over 70 specialist pensioner accounts.

Of the accounts rated, two — St George Bank's Protector Plan B and Maitland Building Society's Pensioner Account — achieved a

10-star rating, which was the highest rating possible. The accounts were examined on the basis of the presence or absence of features valued by older people.

For copies of the report, send \$5 to The Australian Pensioners' and Superannuants' Federation, Suite 62, 8-24 Kippax Street, Surry Hills 2010; phone (02) 281 4566, fax (02) 281 5951.



Can you help?

SERVICES FOR CARERS

Are you one of the two million carers in Australia who look after someone who's ill, elderly or disabled?

If you are, we'd like to hear from you. We are planning an article looking at support available for carers for an issue of *CHOICE* in 1994.

We'd like to hear about your experiences. For example:

- What are the difficulties you face?
- How do you cope with them?
- What outside help have you received?
- Was it adequate?

We're also interested in the costs of private assistance, whether for a week's respite while you have a holiday or getting help with the morning shower. Write to us at **Carers, CHOICE**, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204 by December 15. Please include a daytime telephone number. Thank you.

INCOME PROTECTION INSURANCE

We're planning to publish an article on income protection insurance (which may also be called disability or income replacement cover) in June 1994. If you've ever made a claim under this type of insurance policy, we would like to know about your experiences. Was the process of making a claim easy or difficult? How long did it take to settle the claim? We also want to know about any other experiences you may have had with this type of insurance. Perhaps you wanted to buy a policy but discovered it was too expensive, or you couldn't get cover due to your health or occupation.

If you can help, please write to **Income protection insurance, CHOICE**, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, by February 18, 1994. Thanks for your help.

Health

TV MAKES KIDS FAT

WATCHING television can slow children's metabolic rates by as much as 13%, down to a level lower than when they're doing nothing at all, according to a study published recently in the *American Journal of Pediatrics*.

The study — which is the first to indicate a physiological link between obesity and TV viewing — monitored the energy expenditure of 31 pre-adolescent girls while they were watching episodes of *The Wonder Years*. When their eyes were on the screen all the

children experienced significantly lowered average metabolic rates. The rates of those that were obese fell by more than their non-obese counterparts.

This finding — coupled with the fact that children who watch a lot of TV spend less time outside playing and expending energy, and more time having their taste buds teased by advertisements for high-fat, high-sugar snack foods — gives more weight to the long-held belief that too much television is bad for kids' health.

...T.V. SETS A VIDEOTAPES OF 'THE WONDER YEARS' ARE NOW BEING DRAPPED IN FAMINE AREAS THROUGHOUT THE KNOWN WORLD...



JOLLY JUMPER CAUTION

PARENTS should be cautious when using popular baby exerciser the JOLLY JUMPER following reports from subscribers that it is a potential safety hazard.

We recently purchased a sample of the product to examine its safety for ourselves. The JOLLY JUMPER is essentially a spring-supported harness which can be attached to a door frame with a clamp. The baby is fastened into the device and, when it is properly adjusted, his or her feet should be just touching the ground. It is claimed this enables the baby to push off the ground and learn to bounce, helping with exercise and development.

The product's weakness is with its harness, which consists of an



The Jolly Jumper baby exerciser: check the laces regularly to make sure they're not about to snap. ('Lucy' is one of our lab 'babies', regularly used in tests of children's products.)

elasticated fabric waistband with press-stud fastenings and a padded fabric crotch strap. At the end of the crotch strap a lace is sewn in and threaded through eyelets on the waiststrap and tied in a bow to secure the baby (see photo).

The problem subscribers alerted us to is that the lace can snap suddenly. Our examination of the product confirmed this fastening system is not as secure as it could be. The material used appears to be nothing more than a single shoelace. The lace is under plenty of tension, especially when the baby is bouncing.

No mishaps occurred during our trial of the product but the lace certainly undergoes heavy loading. If it broke on one side of the harness, the child would tilt. The breakage on one side would subject the other to more load, increasing the chance that it too would snap. If both sides of the lace break, the crotch strap is freed and the child may slip through the waistband, risking injury.

The distributor of the JOLLY JUMPER, a company called Fitness-Wise Holdings, claims the product has been on the market for 20 years with no problems, but recently they have had six lace failures. The problem was traced to a fault with the New Zealand manufacturer's automatic eyelet machine. Fitness-Wise assures us the fault has been rectified, but some of the existing stock of Jolly Jumpers in Australia may be defective.

Parents should check the laces regularly and if they encounter any problems, contact Fitness-Wise Holdings by phoning (02) 971 7044 or writing to PO Box 317, Brookvale 2100.

SWIMMING CAPS WARNING

A TRAGIC letter from a consumer has urged us to issue a warning about young children wearing rubber swimming caps.

Mrs Andrew of NSW wrote, "On the 24th of May, 1993, we lost our beautiful [daughter] Hayley. She was put down for her afternoon sleep and pulled a swimming cap (thin rubber) over her head and suffocated. It has shattered our lives, but I'm hoping you can help in that a lot of swimming schools recommend these caps, but it appears they only come in one — adult — size. Hayley was two years and three months old and the cap was loose on her head, but it never occurred

to us she could pull it over her face."

Mrs Andrew found it ironic that the swimming caps were sold in plastic bags which carried warnings about being a suffocation hazard when the caps themselves weren't labelled with any such warning.

Indeed, we think it is important that in future swimming caps do carry warning labels and we've advised the Federal Bureau of Consumer Affairs accordingly. In the meantime, take care not to leave children unattended with these products. When they're not in use, keep them out of reach.

THE FUTURE CALLING

VIDEOPHONES, interactive TV, home shopping ... things that once seemed to belong only on futuristic '60s TV shows like *The Jetsons* are now possible using optical fibre technology. The cost of laying fibre optic cables into every home in Australia means they probably won't become our reality for some time to come, but you can get a preview at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney.

An exhibition, *Telecom Laser-link: at home in the future*, explores the possibilities for telecommunications in the home and the merging worlds of information, entertainment and communication. It gives you the chance to get a hands-on experience of the



future: for example, try a video-phone, write Japanese characters on a touchscreen computer and play an interactive TV quiz game.

Sydneysiders and those planning a visit to the city can see the exhibition at The Powerhouse Museum, 500 Harris Street, Ultimo, until September next year.

DIAL AND SMILE?

THINGS are changing in the world of telecommunications and, as competition is extended to more consumers and a greater range of services, it's expected they will continue to do so. Some people anticipate improvements to the quality of service and lower prices from our phone companies; others fear price-warring may lead to a decline in investment in the telephone network and that rural and isolated consumers will end up with a second-rate service.

While Austel — the Government telecommunications regulatory body — is monitoring the impact of competition as part of its role, we thought CHOICE should also keep an eye on how consumers feel about the changes and whether they find the quality of services goes up or down.

We recently conducted a survey to gather baseline data against which we'll measure changes in the future. Of the 2026 people who took part in the survey, 45% said they were very satisfied with Telecom's telephone service, while 10% were dissatisfied. The reasons people gave for feeling satisfied were that they found the service reliable, efficient and prompt. Those not completely satisfied offered the following reasons: poor service and lack of speed, crossed lines and bad connections, high costs and bad sound quality.

Only 13% of those surveyed had used Optus, and a further 7% had enquired about its services.

As the issue of introducing timed local calls has come up several times in the last few years, we asked people how they'd prefer local calls to be charged. Most said

they wanted to stick to the current situation: a basic rental fee and a flat charge for each local call. Nineteen per cent would prefer a larger basic fee and free local calls; only 10% want to be charged solely according to the length of local calls; and 7% said they'd prefer a basic fee and to be charged according to the length of local calls! There was no apparent difference in the preferences of people living in remote areas and those living in cities, nor between people with dependent children and those without.

Grateful thanks to the subscribers who returned the telecommunications survey to us — your input and support are a great help to us in tracking the direct effects of political decisions on consumers, and in presenting accurate information to government and the phone companies.

Correction

FOR THE TERM OF YOUR LIFE

(CHOICE, September 1993)

On page 21 we said three policies "won't pay a claim unless it is lodged within one month of death or disability". This is still true for the AMPAC and National Australia Financial Management policies, but Colonial Mutual requires the claim to be lodged within three months. We still think this is an unacceptably short time and the change does not affect our recommendations.

Annual buying guide

It's coming up again: the time that turns many a seasoned consumer into a hassled and frenzied shopper: the pre-Christmas shopping rush and January sales. Some thrive on it, others loathe it, but whether you're 'born to shop' or wish you were at the beach instead, you'll probably spend some time and money in the shops during the next few months. Our Annual Buying Guide can help you save both.

We have summarised our reports of most of the products we tested during the last 12 months. Under 'What to buy' you'll find those of our recommended products that are still available. With some products it's a good idea to check our full reports in the relevant issues to find the model with the features you want.

The prices given are a good target to aim for when shopping around; most are based on nationwide checks in September and October 1993. Anything cheaper is a bargain.

PERSONAL

PERFUMES (May 1993)

Perfume: a traditional present often bought by those who left Christmas shopping till late in the afternoon of December 24. If you buy for yourself, all you have to consider is your personal taste — and your hip pocket, of course. But how do you choose a scent that's likely to please somebody else? You're most likely to get the 'right' one if you choose a perfume or *eau de toilette* from the same 'scent family' as the one the person you're buying for usually uses.

Our Belgian counterparts at *Test-Achats* magazine evaluated 94 well-known *eaux de toilette* with the help of a perfume expert and a user panel. Below is a list of some that got top marks from the expert as well as being most liked and least disliked by the user panel, with the scent family in brackets.

GIFT LIST

CACHAREL Anais Anais (Floral)	\$61
GIANFRANCO FERRE (Floral)	\$79
PACO RABANNE La Nuit (Chypre/woody)	\$75
VAN CLEEF & ARPELS First (Fantasy: floral)	\$105*
YVES SAINT-LAURENT Opium (Oriental)	\$98
YVES SAINT-LAURENT Paris (Floral)	\$92
KRIZIA K (Fantasy: sweet/sandalwood)	\$68
MAX FACTOR Le Jardin (Floral)	\$25
BALMAINIvoire (Balsamic/floral)	\$65
GIORGIO ARMANI (Floral)	\$83
GIVENCHY Ysatis (Sandalwood/floral)	\$73
SALVADOR DALI (Balsamic/floral)	\$99

Price given is for 50 mL eau de toilette unless otherwise stated, and was the recommended retail price in 1993.
* 60mL



LEISURE/HOBBIES

COMPACT CAMERAS (February 1993)

Whether you want to preserve your holiday memories, your child's first steps or the winner at the weekend's races, compact cameras will do a good job. While probably too limited for serious photographers, these cameras provide 'point and shoot' convenience for holiday and family snapshots.

There is a wide range of compact 35 mm cameras on the market: with single or dual focal length, fixed or autofocus, autofocus zoom or extended zoom. We tested 76 of them to make the choice easier for you. Apart from technical and performance aspects, we also reported on weight and size — important if you travel light. For details, check our test results in the February issue. Since we tested for the original article, eight of our 12 'Best Buys' have been discontinued, leaving three CANONs and one OLYMPUS from our original recommendations.

For basic family shots, the CANON Prima BF came out best among the fixed-focus cameras.

Sports fans looking for cameras with fast shutter speeds and extended zoom might consider the CANON Epoca 135.

The CANON Prima Twin S and the OLYMPUS Superzoom 110 made the 'Best Buys' list as good travel cameras.

For performance alone, not taking price into account, the following were the best cameras in each group.

WHAT TO BUY

FIXED-FOCUS SINGLE FOCAL LENGTH	
CANON Prima BF	\$129
AUTOFOCUS SINGLE FOCAL LENGTH	
CONTAX T2	\$2100
MINOLTA Riva Mini	\$295
AUTOFOCUS DUAL FOCAL LENGTH	
CANON Prima Twin S	\$299
OLYMPUS AF-10 Twin	\$289
AUTOFOCUS ZOOM	
OLYMPUS AZ-220 Widezoom	\$669
AUTOFOCUS EXTENDED ZOOM	
NIKON TW Zoom 105	\$899
CANON Epoca 135	\$749
OLYMPUS Superzoom 110	\$649

HYBRID BIKES (August 1993)

If you want to improve your physical fitness by cycling on weekend outings over all kinds of terrain as well as making a fast ride to work in the mornings, you don't have to buy two different bikes. A hybrid bike is ideal for both city and weekend riding as it's designed to be a practical compromise between tough-as-nails mountain bikes and lightweight, speedy racing bikes. During the 1993 Big Bike Ride from Port Macquarie to Sydney — organised by the Bicycle Institute of NSW to raise funds for multiple sclerosis research — CHOICE trialled eight hybrid bikes for nine days over more than 600 km.

After the ride, all the trialists agreed the hybrids were fun, adaptable bikes that performed well on dirt and bitumen. Six of the eight bikes tested received almost equally high scores from our trialists, though they're no longer all available. The SHOGUN Metro SE was marginally the trialists' favourite; our research indicates it's still available in the form we tested, and at the price we've been quoted by the manufacturer it's still a good buy.

WHAT TO BUY

SHOGUN Metro SE

\$570-\$600



BLADELINE Nitro

IN-LINE SKATES (December 1992)

For this test we enlisted the help of an enthusiastic team of teenage trialists from Marrickville High School in Sydney.

These trialists plus an expert skater put the skates to the test and commented on comfort and fit, stability and smoothness to ride. In addition we tested their durability on our 'rolling road', a moving conveyor belt designed to simulate skating along a bumpy road. We found not all in-line skates were built to last — a number of wheels shattered, bearings gave out and one skate's stopper wore down by half in one stop only.

In the year since our test most of the skates we tested have been replaced with new models — read our December '92 article, though, for hints on what to look for when you're buying and how to get a good, comfortable fit. Of the skates we tested that are still available, the model below is still a good buy.

WHAT TO BUY

BLADELINE Nitro

\$150

GARDEN

GARDEN HOSES (November 1993)

It's hard enough to muster up the motivation to water the lawn or wash the car on a hot summer's day without a hose that constantly curls itself into knots and stops the water flowing through. But is there really a 'kinkproof' hose? We bought 19 hoses, 18 m in length and 12 mm in diameter, and put them to the test.

If a kinked hose is your personal pet hate, go for one with thick walls. The two top-scoring hoses overall, the NYLEX Tripleflex and the HARDIE POPE Vortex, scored best for kink-resistance, but they were also the two most expensive hoses tested. After 28 days of exposure to intense UV radiation, none of the hoses had cracked or split and none burst under high pressure, though some clearly swelled too much. Only the two hoses mentioned performed very well in all our tests, but five others also scored high enough to make our *What to buy* list.

WHAT TO BUY

NYLEX Tripleflex	\$29.95
HARDIE POPE Vortex	\$31.86
HARDIE POPE Tricoflex	\$22.95
MITRE 10 Gardener's Own Premium Quality	
equal	\$29.50
NYLEX Premier	\$28.00
NYLEX Commando	\$27.95
BBC Premium Quality	\$25.95

Prices are those we paid in June 1993.

PETROL LAWNMOWERS (November 1993)

For our report in last month's issue we tested 10 petrol lawnmowers costing less than \$500, plus a new cordless electric model, the BLACK & DECKER Stealth. We couldn't recommend it, however, because of its poor cutting performance and heavy weight.

All the petrol-fuelled mowers tested passed our safety tests, and all but one cut various types and lengths of grass well or fairly well. Listed below are the top three performers, but all those tested except the MTD 112 were considered adequate mowers.

WHAT TO BUY

FLYMO RL-480	\$495
FLYMO RL-320	\$469
ROVER Combat 2014	\$499

SHOGUN Metro SE



COMMUNICATIONS

TELEPHONES
(November 1993)

If you're thinking of buying a phone, you're probably looking for a special feature — or even colour — your standard rental TELECOM TouchFone 200 doesn't have. The telephones available in Australia for under \$90 (the price of a TouchFone 200) do have many different features: direct-access memories, last-number redial, recall key, variable-volume ringing, on-hook dialling, hands-free operation, on-hook hold, mute button — if not all in the one model.

In last month's CHOICE we explained all these different features and reported on our tests of 14 telephones (both of normal size and slim phones) with memories. We evaluated their sound quality, assessed their features and dropped them on the floor to test durability. All survived the drop test from a table, only two had a better sound quality than TELECOM's TouchFone 200, and all but one were judged OK for sound quality. We couldn't recommend the DUOFONE ET-11T/P, but any of the others listed below is worth a look. Check the full report for details on which phones have which features.

WHAT TO BUY

(in alphabetical order)

AUDIOLINE 4	\$50
AUDIOLINE 33	\$80
AUDIOLINE 38	\$90
COMPUTEC 8906	\$59
FEATUREPHONE	\$90
GTE 2010	\$80
HARDIE COMMUNICATIONS T10	\$50
HARDIE COMMUNICATIONS T20	\$40
NETSET ET-718	\$55
SHIMASU F5010	\$60
TANDY ET-29	\$70
TELECOM Access 20	\$75
TELECOM TF200	\$89

COMPUTER PRINTERS
(March 1993)

We tested inkjet, thermal fusion and 24-pin dot matrix printers priced at less than \$750 at the time of buying. While inkjet and thermal fusion printers produce better-quality print and are less noisy than dot matrix printers, the ink cartridges and special ribbons required for these types of printer are comparatively expensive. On the other hand, if you have to print multipart forms or letters with carbon copies, only a dot matrix printer can do the job.

The models tested varied greatly in their paper-handling capability — some take single ('cut') sheets, some continuous forms and some can handle both. Which type and model is right for you depends on what you want to do with your printer. Our recommendations below are for three scenarios; if none applies to you, check the test results for detailed information.

WHAT TO BUY

HIGH-QUALITY CUT-SHEET PRINTERS

HEWLETT PACKARD DJ 500 (inkjet)	\$699
CANON BJ-10ex (inkjet)	\$499
OLIVETTI JP 150 (inkjet)	\$499
EPSON LQ-100* (dot matrix)	\$459

GENERAL HOME OR SMALL BUSINESS USE
(all dot matrix)

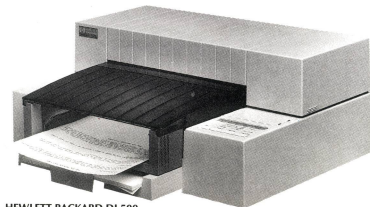
equal PANASONIC KX-P2123	\$599
equal STAR LC24-20	\$499
NEC P3200	\$480
equal EPSON LQ100*	\$459
equal BROTHER M1324	\$495

PORTABLE PRINTERS THAT CAN RUN ON
BATTERY POWER

CANON BJ-10ex (inkjet)	\$499
CITIZEN PN48 (thermal fusion)	\$485**

* This model has a built-in cut-sheet feeder but no tractor feeder (for continuous forms); it is available as an optional extra. All the other dot matrix models have a built-in tractor feeder, with a cut-sheet feeder as an optional extra. Of the inkjets, only the Hewlett Packard DJ 500 comes with a cut-sheet feeder; with the others you can only feed in single sheets by hand unless you buy a cut-sheet feeder as an optional extra. The same goes for the CITIZEN PN48 thermal fusion printer.

** Without batteries.



HEWLETT PACKARD DJ 500

CORDLESS PHONES
(December 1992)

The cordless phones we tested for the December 1992 CHOICE report are currently available from around \$160 to \$380. The more expensive phone, the more features it generally has, we found. With the top-rating PANASONIC KX-T3000BA/AUS, for example, you're never caught out with a flat battery: its base can hold a spare one permanently on charge and you can easily replace it. It stores 10 numbers in memory and has a two-way paging and intercom feature between handset and base. The volume of incoming calls can be adjusted and calls received at the base as well as at the handset, which allows for three-way conversations.

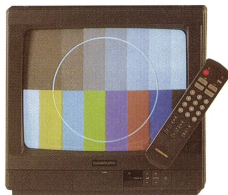
All the phones listed below worked effectively within a 150 metre range from the base. If you need one that works up to 200 metres away, the PANASONIC KX-T3826BA/AUS, the SUPERFONE CT-1000AUS and the VOCA CT3800 AUS worked well within that range.

WHAT TO BUY

PANASONIC KX-T3000BA/AUS	\$369
PANASONIC KX-T3826BA/AUS	\$265
SHIMASU F-7220-AUS	\$199
SHIMASU F-7102-AUS	\$189
SUPERFONE CT-1000AUS	\$379
VOCA CT3800 AUS	\$249
PANASONIC KX-T3806BA/AUS	\$259
SHIMASU F-7002-AUS	\$160



PANASONIC KX-T3000BA/AUS



SAMSUNG CB-3351X

ENTERTAINMENT

MULTI-DISC CD PLAYERS (March 1993)

If you want excellent sound reproduction, a CD player beats cassette decks or turntables, and for a little more money you can get a multi-disc CD player which can be loaded with up to five or six CDs in a drawer, on a turntable or in a cartridge. "It's like having your very own jukebox," we wrote, with access to 50-100 tracks at any one time.

We tested 11 models at the cheap end of the market — below \$450 at the time of purchase. For a higher price, multi-disc CD players with better programming options are available. On the ones we tested, turning off the player or removing the discs automatically erased any programmed memory. If the thought of too much programming puts you off, though, stick to single-disc models; it's a bit more complicated with the multi-disc players.

Most of the models we tested have since been discontinued, including the top performer (the SONY CDP-C325), which was well ahead of the others. However, the sound quality of all the models was excellent and we think you'd be happy with any of them. For more details of features of the models tested, check the March issue.

WHAT TO BUY

AKAI CD-A610	\$349
SHERWOOD CDC-5010R	\$379



WEBER One-Touch

PORTABLE TELEVISIONS (April 1993)

Portable televisions hold a 35% share of the TV market and are generally bought as second sets, for example for the bedroom. It's therefore important you can do as much as possible by remote control. For our tests we bought all 34 cm remote control models available at the time for under \$600. All weighed around 10 kg and should be easy to move around, although some didn't help by not having carry handles.

The SAMSUNG CB-3351X received our 'Best Buy' laureate because of its good picture quality and low price. Overall it scored equal second, let down by a slight sound distortion at higher volumes. The top performing JVC model has since been changed.

WHAT TO BUY

equal	PANASONIC TC-14L3A	\$499
	SAMSUNG CB-3351X	\$399
	HITACHI CPT 1459	\$499

KETTLE BARBECUES (January 1993)

For chargrilled steaks, traditional roasts, smoked fish: stay out of the kitchen and try a kettle barbecue this summer. In kettle barbecues food can be prepared the traditional way over hot coals, or may be cooked slowly with the lid on to give a barbecue flavour.

Only with much trial and error could our testers eventually cook food to their satisfaction on all the models tested, as only the WEBERs came with easily understandable operating and assembly instructions, troubleshooting guide and recipe book. All but one of the models tested use solid fuel, which means long warming-up and cooling-down times as well as messy charcoal briquette handling. The WEBER One-Touch at least makes it easy to clean up the ashes.

The only gas-fuelled model we tested, the DOWNUNDER, was the most expensive model to buy, but it's cheaper to operate, leaves no mess and you get immediate heat (five minutes to reach cooking temperature) and shorter cooling-down times. Check the individual profiles in the January 1993 issue for more details.

WHAT TO BUY

WEBER	One-Touch (solid fuel)	\$239
WEBER	Bar-B-Kettle (solid fuel)	\$199
MECO	Swinger 44050 (solid fuel)	\$229
DOWNUNDER	(gas)	\$349

VIDEO RECORDERS (March 1993)

We tested 11 video recorders at the cheap end of the market — below \$500. In our tests we took a close look at ease of use, since incomprehensible programming instructions can often cause trouble. We found five basic programming methods among these models, some of them easier to grasp than others. However, while the AMSTRAD UF22 came with an exemplary remote control and proved easiest to use, we couldn't recommend it because of its poor picture quality in fast-forward or rewind 'search' mode, which means the 'search' facility is in effect useless. Too much 'noise' on the picture in these models was also a problem for the TEAC MV315 and the GENEXXA VR-2100. The AKAI VS-F260 topped our recommendation list because of its good picture and sound quality and reasonable ease of use.

WHAT TO BUY

AKAI VS-F260	\$429
SHARP VC-A39X*	\$499
SANYO VHR-220	\$465
GOLDSTAR R-G20H	\$449

* We tested the SHARP VC-A38X, but the manufacturer claims there are no significant differences.

LOW ALCOHOL BEER (April 1993)

Increased health consciousness — and the fear of losing your driver's licence — have certainly contributed to the steadily rising popularity of low-alcohol beer. One in four beers sold in Australia is now a light beer. Since 1989, it has also been cheaper than full-strength beer. But the discerning beer connoisseur will undoubtedly agree that taste, above all, determines the success or failure of a new beer on the market. The top-selling TOOHEYS BLUE LABEL BITTER and other new-style light beers are darker in colour and taste more bitter than the older-style, paler light beers. According to our panel of expert beer tasters, they also taste better.

Below are our panel's top-scoring beers. If you want to know more about an individual brand's preservative, kilojoule and alcohol content, check out the test report.

WHAT TO BUY

LOW-ALCOHOL BEERS		Case
FOSTER'S SPECIAL BITTER		\$19.95
CASCADE TIGER HEAD BITTER		\$24.95
TOOHEYS BLUE LABEL BITTER*		\$18.95
VERY LOW-ALCOHOL DRINKS		
CLAUSTHALER (0.5% alcohol)		\$45.25**
SWAN LIGHT LAGER (0.9% alcohol)		\$21.90

* Previously called TOOHEYS BLUE LABEL LIGHT BITTER

** 24 x 330 mL bottles

HOUSEHOLD

FLUED GAS HEATERS
(April 1993)

If you have — or are planning to build — a house with large or open-plan rooms and want to be prepared for next winter, you might consider buying a flued gas heater. They are more expensive to buy and install than unflued heaters, but any toxic or unpleasant gas emissions will be removed through your roof or wall cavity. Also called wall furnaces, some models can be mounted flush or semi-recessed into a wall cavity.

All the models tested returned similarly satisfactory results in various technical tests, but the RINNAIs performed best in terms of energy efficiency. Considering price as well as performance, the IXL would be 'Best Buy'.

WHAT TO BUY

FOR LARGE ROOMS

equal	RINNAI Energysaver 551FT	\$1361
	RINNAI Energysaver 553FT	\$1549
	IXL Finesse 10863S	\$899

FOR EXTRA-LARGE AREAS OR OPEN PLAN

	RINNAI Energysaver 1001FT	\$1729
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Prices don't include installation

WATER HEATERS
(August 1993)

There are more differences between the types of water heater available than between brands and models. We therefore decided to do a type test with seven models of water heater (a HARDIE-DUX, a VULCAN, four RHEEMs and a RINNAI), representing the five most commonly used types of water heater: electric off-peak storage, electric continuous storage, gas storage, high-efficiency gas storage and gas instantaneous. Solar heaters were not included in this test.

Since we only tested types rather than brands, there is no *What To Buy* list. We made some general observations, however. Electric continuous water heaters are the most expensive option by far because of their running cost. Off-peak electric and gas storage heaters are much cheaper to run, with very little to choose between them when purchase price, running costs and interest forgone on the purchase price are taken into account. High-efficiency gas heaters have the edge over the more common fast-recovery type.

WASHING MACHINES
(January and September 1993)

There's something new on the washing machine market: a 'hybrid' or top-loading front loader — a washing machine with top-loading access yet front-loading action and a horizontal drum: the BENDIX PCA 84E. However, it had disappointingly low washing results. Other top/ front loaders are available overseas but not yet in Australia. Wait for future tests, if you can.

Otherwise, almost all the 79 family-size washing machines under \$2000 we reported on passed the dirt removal test satisfactorily, but there were big differences in spin efficiency, gentleness and water and energy consumption. Our tests again confirmed that front loaders in general are better washing machines than top loaders: they are gentler to clothes, spin faster, leave clothes drier and use less water and electricity. However, they are generally more expensive and cycle times take longer.

For complete results of all machines tested, see the test report. If you can't afford the expensive top performers, consider our 'Best Buys' below.

TOP PERFORMERS

FRONT LOADERS

MIELE W698 Hydromatic	\$1999
THOR L692RX	\$1575

BEST BUYS

FRONT LOADERS

HOOVER Electra 540	\$959
HOOVER Electra 545 (with heater)	\$999

TOP LOADERS

FISHER & PAYKEL Smart Drive GW701*	\$1100
FISHER & PAYKEL Smart Drive GW501*	\$900
FISHER & PAYKEL Smart Drive GW601*	\$1000
HITACHI PAF 1220P	\$899
SIMPSON Concorde 36C527S	\$679
SIMPSON Deluxe 36C526S	\$726
SIMPSON Genesis 36D525S	\$684
SIMPSON Genesis 36D528S	\$778
SIMPSON Riviera 36D4295**	\$670
WESTINGHOUSE Laundromat LD555S	\$679

IF YOU WANT A TOP LOADER WITH A HEATER,
YOU HAVE ONLY ONE OPTION:

HOOVER Elite 1225	\$1000
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* We tested FISHER & PAYKEL Smart Drive model numbers GW700, GW500 and GW600. The new models have cosmetic changes only which the manufacturer claims should not affect performance, and some extra features.

** We tested the SIMPSON Riviera 36D427S. The new model has cosmetic changes only which the manufacturer claims should not affect performance.

VACUUM CLEANERS
(October 1993)

While upright vacuum cleaners are generally good performers, for the first time they didn't all outscore their barrel counterparts in our tests for dirt pick-up performance. A higher wattage doesn't mean more suction power either. Our tests proved that the design, and in particular the positioning of the fan and the bag, is more important for the cleaning performance of upright models than the size of motor. The two top-performing HOOVER upright models are examples of this, with dirt pick-up scores more than twice as high as all the other models tested, including some other uprights. The HOOVER Turbolite U4593-006 is a fairly basic model which scored lower for ease of use but highest in dust pick-up.

If you're more interested in a barrel cleaner for hard-to-get-at places, stairs or your car, the MIELE S247i was the best of the barrel models. All the models tested were priced around \$300 when we bought them.

WHAT TO BUY

HOOVER Duet U2740 (U)	\$299
HOOVER Turbolite U4593-006 (U)	\$279
PANASONIC MC-E41N (U)	\$279
MIELE S247i	\$299

(U) upright model

Prices are those found in August 1993

HOOVER Duet U2740



HIGH CHAIRS (July 1993)

Since Australia has no safety standards for high chairs, those on the market may not meet basic safety criteria. We therefore put safety first in our tests of 15 high chairs — and the results were indeed a worry. Some models presented outright safety risks: in those that had no child restraints, the child could easily fall out of the chair and injure her/himself; others had no safety warnings or failed our strength test on the tray. Convenience wasn't high on the agenda with most chairs either: some had shallow trays that didn't contain spills well and were difficult to remove, adjust and clean; some couldn't be folded or were difficult to fold away, while others had no child support and didn't look comfortable at all.

Only two high chairs passed all the safety tests and had good restraints, and with the CAM Ritmo significantly cheaper than the other, it is obviously the 'Best Buy'. If you can't find either of them, the MOTHER'S CHOICE and the GERRY 385 only failed some of the tests by a narrow margin.

WHAT TO BUY

equal	CAM Ritmo	\$129
	MONBEBE Stella	\$210



BUDGET-PRICED SEWING MACHINES (April 1993)

For those who just want to do a few basic sewing jobs, who sew infrequently or don't want to spend a lot of money on a sewing machine, we tested 10 budget-priced models without computerised features. For our ratings we concentrated on sewing performance (stitch quality) and ease of use. Four of the models tested couldn't even score 50% for sewing performance, while the BERNETTE 730 and the JANOME Mystyle 20 were easier to use than the others. For full test results and detailed profiles of the machines, check the April issue.

WHAT TO BUY

equal	BERNETTE 730	\$499
	JANOME Mystyle 20	\$399
	PFaff Hobby 422*	\$549
	TOYOTA 4081*	\$399
	ELNITA 200	\$299

* We tested the PFaff Hobby 420 and the TOYOTA 4080. The new models have cosmetic changes only which the manufacturer claims should not affect performance.

SHAMPOO VACUUM CLEANERS (May 1993)

If you ever thought of buying a shampoo vacuum cleaner for occasional carpet shampooing as well as normal dry vacuuming, think again. The models available on the market — known as 3-in-1 machines — are intended for vacuuming, shampooing and mopping up spills, yet all the models we tested performed badly as normal dry vacuumers (with less than 30% dirt pick-up scores). They disappointed in their wet shampooing capacity as well (most only scoring 30% or 40% for cleaning), but all sucked up spills pretty well.

Only the VOLTA Trio U76 got a 60% cleaning score for wet shampooing, with a top overall score of just 50%. If you really want to buy a shampoo vacuum cleaner, this one is ahead of the others, but the BRITEX Steam Cleaner — available for hire from major supermarkets at \$42 per day — performed just as well.

KITCHEN

WATER FILTERS (February and September 1993)

Jug-type water filters like the ones we tested can make water look, smell and taste better, but our tests showed they won't necessarily make it safe if it's not safe to start with. In most parts of Australia, however, tap water is safe to drink. If it's chlorine that bothers you, its smell and taste can be reduced by letting a jug of water stand for a while before using it. If you think a water filter will make your water more pleasant to drink, choose from the list below — and remember to change the filter regularly so there's no chance for bacteria to grow in it.

WHAT TO BUY

AQUASPACE Carafe	\$90
BAMIX Water Boy	\$30
BLACKMORES Filter Fresh	\$55
BRITA AquaExport	\$40
GLACIER PURE Water Pitcher	\$10
KAMBROOK K25	\$20

WALL OVENS (electric, multi-function) (June and October 1993)

If you're not familiar with the terminology used to describe certain features, you may end up confused when you're out to buy a wall oven. Manufacturers use terms such as 'fan-forced', 'fan-assisted', 'fan-grill,' etc, to describe attributes of three different types of oven on the market: conventional, fan-forced (or convection) and multi-function. Make sure you read our report on electric multi-function wall ovens to help you choose the one with the features you want.

While the FISHER & PAYKEL and the BOSCH performed best and second best respectively in the tests, our 'Best Buys' are the Australian-made SIMPSON and WESTINGHOUSE, which both scored nearly as well for ease of use and cooking performance, and cost significantly less.

WHAT TO BUY

FISHER & PAYKEL 755T	\$1239
BOSCH HB632TAU/01	\$1769
SIMPSON 68-912*01	\$979
WESTINGHOUSE POE666MF***00	\$949
BLANCO BMS601	\$1795
WHIRLPOOL 6MFO5	\$1299

* and *** refer to spaces where different numbers or letters will appear, depending on the exact model designation.

DISHWASHERS (February and November 1993)

A good dishwasher is expected to wash large loads quietly and quickly, but more and more environmentally aware consumers are also looking for energy and water efficiency. After all, an efficient model will not only save water and electricity but will save you money in the long run. Dishwashers have become more water-efficient over the years, but there are still large differences between models. And the most energy-efficient KLEENMAID DW-2 would cost \$500 to power over 10 years if used once a day, while the least efficient SIMPSON 880M would cost \$695 to run.

In February we reported on our tests of dishwashers selling for less than \$2000 that could fit at least 12 place settings. Vulcan had just discontinued its DISHLEX models and hadn't released its new models in time for our report. Because of Vulcan's large share in the dishwasher market, however, we tested the models for the November update, but couldn't recommend any of them. They scored poorly for their washing ability; poor filtering meant when dirt was removed it was simply redeposited on the dishes.

WHAT TO BUY

MIELE G 572 (FW)	\$1449
AEG Favorit 675 (FW)	\$1250
KLEENMAID DW-2 (FW)	\$1299
ASKO ASEA 1403-262 (B)	\$1400
equal BLANCO BIDW 60 (I)	\$1600
BOSCH SMS 5012 (FW)	\$1150
SMEG LA 40 (FW)	\$1295
BOSCH SMS 7062 (FW)*	\$1700
OMEGA DW 1407-2 (FW)	\$1099
SIMPSON 880M (M)**	\$850

FW Freestanding with a worktop.

B Built-in: must be installed under a kitchen bench but doesn't require special decor panels.

I Integrated: must be installed under a kitchen bench and is normally supplied without base panels, decor panels or worktop, to enable you to colour co-ordinate with your kitchen.

M Mobile: you wheel it up to the sink and attach the hose to a mixer tap each time you use it, rather than it being plumbed in.

* Integrated model SMI 7062 also available.

** Built-in model 880B also available.



AEG SB2-400N

FROST-FREE FRIDGES (May 1993)

In Australian summer conditions, a good refrigerator that won't let you down when the temperature climbs is an absolute must. As well as freezing ability, insulation, ease of use and noise, we tested energy consumption on nine models in the 350-400 L range. In most cases the models were even more energy-efficient than claimed. In fact they all performed similarly, with overall scores ranging only between 57% and 63%.

Watch out for future test reports on CFC-free fridges. Email has already released two models (a 410 L WESTINGHOUSE and a 300 L KELVINATOR) with a hydrofluorocarbon refrigerant (HFC 134a).

WHAT TO BUY

SAMSUNG SR-398	\$1048
equal FISHER & PAYKEL N395BP (U)*	\$1229
FISHER & PAYKEL N375TP*	\$1085
FISHER & PAYKEL N369BP (U)*	\$1132
SAMSUNG SR-348	\$1049
KELVINATOR N400A*	\$1169
equal KELVINATOR N350A*	\$1049
NORGE PT38F	\$1169
FRIGIDAIRE FF360ADP*	\$1099

(U) 'Upside-down model' — freezer below fridge section.
* We tested FISHER & PAYKEL models N395BP, N375TP and N369BP, the KELVINATOR N400A and N351A and the FRIGIDAIRE FF363 CDP. The new models have cosmetic changes only which the manufacturers claim should not affect performance.

HOME WORKSHOP

IMPACT (HAMMER) DRILLS (August 1992)

We tested impact drills with a price of less than \$180 at the time we purchased. The AEG SB2-400 N was the best-performing drill in both ordinary and impact modes and it's also one of the cheapest units. However, buying it would limit your options for use as it lacks variable speed control and reverse running.

The next most powerful drill in impact mode was the HITACHI FDV 12V. It has variable speed and reverse action and is the one to buy if you want these useful features.

Ease of use is a major consideration: check for handle comfort, whether an auxiliary handle is supplied, a large chuck key and sensible switches for impact/normal and forward/reverse action.

WHAT TO BUY

AEG SB2-400 N	\$137
HITACHI FDV 12V	\$149

PAINT FOR EXTERIOR TIMBER (June 1993)

The upcoming summer holiday period might be a good time for giving your weatherboard house or timber shed a new coat of paint. It takes time to test the durability and performance of exterior paint — we started the process at the end of 1991, when we painted soft- and hardwood panels with white, beige and brown colours (intended to represent a colour range from lightest to darkest) of all nationally available exterior house paints. In our June issue we published a report of the results so far. It's still too early to recommend particular brands, but we were certainly able to list the poor performers: those paints that had already cracked, peeled, retained too much dirt or changed colour. Unfortunately, the only environmentally friendly paint made from natural substances failed badly in white and was only just adequate in beige and brown. For a guide to what to buy we listed the paints below — they're the ones that remained sound after 44 months on the top of our Murrumbidgee building in our last test, and are still available and doing well so far in the present one.

As usual with paint, it's hard to give a guide to price as it's often on special — shop around for any of the recommended paints at a good price when you're ready to buy.

WHAT TO BUY

(in alphabetical order within colours)

WHITE PAINTS

- BRISTOL Supreme Gloss Enamel (O)
- BRISTOL Weather Tough Gloss Exterior Acrylic (W)
- DULUX Weathershield Exterior Low Sheen Acrylic (Vivid White) (W)
- PERFORMER Interior & Exterior Gloss (O)
- PERFORMER Solarshield Exterior Gloss (W)
- PRICEBRAND Gloss Enamel (O)*
- WALPAMUR Low Sheen Acrylic (W)**
- WATTLY High Gloss Enamel (O)
- WATTLY Weathercare Gloss Acrylic (W)

CREAM PAINTS

- BRISTOL Supreme Gloss Enamel (Honey Hue) (O)
- DULUX Weathershield Exterior Low Sheen Acrylic (Warm White) (W)
- PASCOL High Gloss Enamel (Desert Sand) (O)
- PERFORMER Solarshield Exterior Gloss (Oyster White) (W)
- WALPAMUR Low Sheen Acrylic (Off White) (W)**
- WATTLY High Gloss Enamel (Federation Cream) (O)
- WATTLY Weathercare Gloss Acrylic (Federation Cream) (W)

BROWN PAINTS

- DULUX Weathershield Exterior Gloss Acrylic (Mission Brown) (W)

(O) Oil-based (W) Water-based

* Previously called SUPERFLOW.

** Previously called WALPAMUR Acrylic Flat for Exterior Use.



TWO-LITRE WINES: TIME IS TIGHT

Two-litre wine casks offer quality, convenience and value, but in as little as six months they can show the ill effects of old age.

DO YOU KEEP a cask in the fridge for weekdays and open a bottle on the weekend? According to market research that's the type of person likely to buy two-litre wine casks. Quality is an issue. But so is value for money and the convenience of not having to drink it all at once.

After a short period of rapid growth in the Australian market, sales of two-litre wine casks have levelled. The recession and changing patterns of drinking, as well as heavy discounting of bottled wine, have affected the cask market. By the end of the 1980s, 64% of all table white wine and 41% of table red wine produced ended up in a cask.

Two-litre cask wines are presented as containing wine of bottle quality. With our expert tasting panel we put that to the test and found several casks which support the claim.

THE NAME OF THE ROSÉ, AND OTHER VARIETALS

Two-litre casks are marketed differently from four-litre casks. Quality and price are two features, but naming is another important difference. Most four-litre

casks are sold at present under generic names: riesling, claret, white burgundy, chablis. These are often blends of several grape types. In particular, sultana and gordo grapes are commonly used as they deliver a lot of juice for maybe half the cost of grapes with more prestigious names, like Sauvignon Blanc or even proper Rhine Riesling.

On the other hand, two-litre casks are generally labelled with a varietal name: Semillon, Colombar, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay. Here the dominant grape type is identified.

That would seem a logical system, but unfortunately it's not that simple. The Food Standards Code allows winemakers to use other grape types than the labelled varieties provided it's no more than 20%.

So, for example, RENMANO Hermitage (Hermitage is another name for the Shiraz grape) contains 90% Shiraz and 10% Grenache, while YALUMBA RESERVE SELECTION Chardonnay is 85% Chardonnay. A good reason for this practice is to deal with seasonal variations (such as sweetness) in the varietal grapes, which may benefit from some adjustment to maintain quality and taste.

THE PLASTIC BAGS AREN'T AIRTIGHT

The plastic bags inside wine casks are made from three or more layers of polyethylene film with an additional layer of a light and heat reflectant like metallised (aluminium) polyester sandwiched between them.

It's important to realise that the packaging is not airtight. Some air comes in contact with the wine by entering through or around the tap, or even through the plastic film; this leads to oxidation.

Oxidation makes wine taste 'off'; for example, the aroma may begin to develop a 'cardboard' character and the taste may become dull, stale or unpleasant. This is more of a problem with two-litre casks than four-litre as there is relatively greater surface contact between the wine and the bag in the smaller cask.

This is one of the reasons why you should drink cask wine when it's fresh. The rule is: *Wine doesn't improve in the cask.* This is the opposite of what you'd expect from wine in the bottle, so it represents a reversal of attitude. (Champagne and sparkling wines are also made

The best casks: the Yalumba Reserve Selection Chardonnay and Yalumba Reserve Selection Cabernet Sauvignon were the overall top scorers, but our two 'Best Buys' came close and are cheaper.



to be consumed as soon as they're released on the market.)

When we were planning this project, information from a range of experts indicated oxidation would not generally become noticeable until the wine had spent at least nine to 12 months in the pack.

The surprise result of our taste test is that deterioration was clearly showing in some wines with a mere six months in the unopened cask.

All these wines came with a 'packed on' date stamp, but our test shows this is not enough information. If consumers haven't read this article they are not going to know they need to pick a fresh product, so information should be shown prominently on the cask.

We'd like to see the 'packed on' date system retained, with the addition of the information, "This wine is best consumed within six months of the 'packed on' date". This standard message could be printed on the box.

In this way manufacturers could counteract poor stock control practices at retail level and assist consumers to taste their products at their optimum.

SULPHUR DIOXIDE AND ASTHMATICS

However, don't buy too fresh either: it takes two to three months from the packing date for some of the initial sulphur dioxide in the wine to dissipate. With younger casks you might notice the initial aroma may be a touch acid, but unless you've got a highly refined palate it's unlikely you'd notice the taste.

Sulphur dioxide (SO₂) is used in foods as a preservative. In fact it was

used as a preservative in wine by the ancient Greeks, Romans and Egyptians and is still the main preservative in wine today. It helps prevent or slow down the browning of grapes (especially important for white wines) and the growth of lactic acid and acetic acid bacteria (which give wine a vinegar taste) to ensure the desired yeast will dominate the fermentation process. It also stabilises the wine colour and chemically traps some undesirable compounds.

SO₂ is a very useful preservative. However, its presence can trigger an asthma attack in a susceptible person. For some, one sip of wine may be all it takes, while other asthmatics may be able to drink several glasses.

Wine standards are currently being redrafted and it's likely the new standard will be more stringent regarding the allowable level of SO₂. The proposed limit for most wines is likely to be 250 mg per litre (at 20°C).

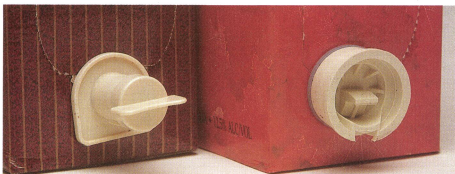
We had the wines analysed and found none exceeded this limit (see the table overleaf). SO₂ levels were lower in red casks than white and, when we compared them to bottles, we found white wine casks had more SO₂ than the bottles while the red bottles had more SO₂ than the casks.

Other additives are the preservatives ascorbic acid, potassium sorbate and erythorbic acid. Ascorbic acid (vitamin C) is a fast-acting anti-oxidant which retards browning (of the grapes) and off flavours. Potassium sorbate is an antifungal and antimicrobial preservative, while erythorbic acid acts like ascorbic acid but has less anti-oxidant activity.

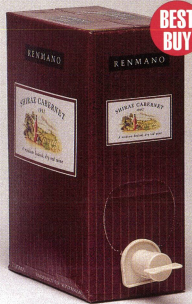
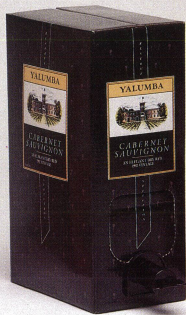
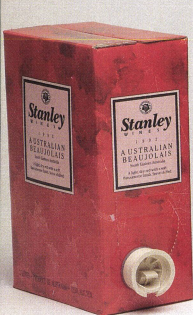
PLAYING TAPS

There are two types of tap in use for wine casks (see photo, below). Are there any differences?

■ **Lift-the-flap:** This can be operated with one hand, though some people have



The search for the perfect tap: the type on the right may break your fingernail, but the twisting tap becomes unreliable once the cask is more than half empty.



damaged their fingernails using this type of tap. (Found on Stanley 2L and most 4L casks.)

■ **Turn-the-handle:** This tap gives a more accurate pour under most conditions. However, when the cask is more than half empty it takes two hands to operate — one to turn the tap and the other to stop the cask from tipping over in the direction of the twist. If this happens it's possible for the tap to move and to spray wine at an angle. (This type of tap is found on McWilliams, Renmano and Yalumba 2L casks.)

One of the benefits of this kind of tap is that it's designed to keep a better seal on the bag until opened. Inside the tap is a sharp point which, when the handle is first turned, pierces a membrane across the bag; it's a corkscrew effect. In contrast, the lift-the-flap tap forms a seal by pressing a flexible plastic tongue against the opening, like a trapdoor.

To overcome some of the ease-of-use problems associated with the turn-the-handle taps, Yalumba is working on a push-valve tap which can be operated single-handed all the time as there won't be a twisting action required.

RESULTS OF OUR TASTE TEST

How do the wines compare on taste? We formed a taste panel of eight experts (see *Thanks to our judges* overleaf) and let them assess the wines blind (that is, without seeing the packaging or knowing the brand). Each wine was scored out of a maximum of 20 points, and scores were averaged to give the results shown in the table.

The wines were divided into four categories: dry white, riesling, rosé and light red, and dry red.

We thought it worthwhile to compare these wines with adjacent quality classes, so we pitted the casks against the top-selling bottled wine for each category and against the top-selling four-litre cask.

In all except the dry red class at least one cask rated higher than the bottle. In the dry white segment, the **QUEEN ADELAIDE** Chardonnay — the best selling bottled white wine of 1992 — was well beaten.

The popular four-litre casks are clearly for those situations where quantity is more important than quality. You can see from the taste test results they didn't compete well with the two-litre wines.

Our wine tasters were generally impressed with the quality of the two-litre cask wines. Though few wines were outstanding, they showed very few wine-making faults. Technically their quality is high.

There is not a great depth of fruit flavour (particularly in the whites), but you can expect a clean taste with a good balance of acid and sweetness. Most whites have managed to avoid being simple and sweet, though it's only from the top scorers that you'll get any real varietal character and lip-smacking charm.

The favoured white was the **YALUMBA RESERVE SELECTION** Chardonnay — a dry white style. For a sweeter white, go for the **YALUMBA Traminer**. This wine topped the Traminer class at the Sydney Show this year — something

of an irony for a cask!

There are a couple of good contenders from the dry red class: **YALUMBA RESERVE SELECTION** Cabernet Sauvignon and **RENMANO Shiraz Cabernet**. The latter is the better buy, at around \$8.00. None of the light reds was a particularly great drink; strictly for picnics — and chilled at that.

WHAT TO BUY

Obviously our taste panel judged the current vintages of these wines, so scores could be expected to vary somewhat from year to year. However, these results point out the quality leaders, and wine-makers aim to provide a consistent level of quality in their casks.

DRY WHITE

YALUMBA RESERVE SELECTION Chardonnay*	\$10.00
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RIESLING

YALUMBA Traminer* (Best Buy)	\$8.50
McWILLIAM'S HILLSIDE Traminer Riesling	\$8.50

ROSÉ AND LIGHT RED

STANLEY Australian Beaujolais	\$8.50
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DRY RED

YALUMBA RESERVE SELECTION Cabernet Sauvignon*	\$10.00
RENMANO Shiraz Cabernet (Best Buy)	\$8.00

* Yalumba has two categories of 2L cask wine: the cheaper **YALUMBA** and the more expensive **YALUMBA RESERVE SELECTION**. The **YALUMBA RESERVE SELECTION Sauvignon Blanc** was not available at the time of our taste test.

Prices shown are a good target to aim for — they were obtained in late October 1993 (post Budget price rise) from a major national discount liquor chain, and will undoubtedly be higher in some other shops.

Two-litre wine casks

Brand and type	Vintage year	Alcohol/volume (%)	Target price* (\$)	Price per litre (\$)	Labelled additives	Total sulphur dioxide (mg/L)	Overall tasting
DRY WHITE							
YALUMBA RESERVE SELECTION Chardonnay	1993	12.4	10.00	5.00	220, 300	170	16.9
YALUMBA Colombard Semillon Chardonnay	1993	10.5	8.50	4.25	220, 300	155	16.0
YALUMBA RESERVE SELECTION Chenin Blanc	1993	10.5	10.00	5.00	220, 300	150	15.9
McWILLIAM'S HILLSIDE Colombard Chardonnay	ns	11.5	8.50	4.25	220, 300	115	15.6
RENMANO Colombard Semillon Chardonnay	1992	11.5	8.00	4.00	202, 220, 300	150	15.4
QUEEN ADELAIDE Chardonnay (bottle)	1993	11.5	5.50	7.33	220, 300	95	15.0
STANLEY Semillon Chardonnay	1992	11.5	8.50	4.25	202, 220, 300	145	14.9
LINDEMANS Cellar Pack Chablis (4L)	ns	10.0	9.00	2.25	220, 300	95	14.7
RIESLING							
YALUMBA Traminer	1993	10.5	8.50	4.25	220, 300	135	16.5
McWILLIAM'S HILLSIDE Traminer Riesling	ns	11.5	8.50	4.25	220, 300	125	16.3
QUEEN ADELAIDE Rhine Riesling (bottle)	1992	12.0	5.50	7.33	220, 300	105	16.1
STANLEY Traminer Riesling	1991	11.0	8.50	4.25	202, 220, 317	125	15.5
YALUMBA Rhine Riesling	1992	11.0	8.50	4.25	220, 300	150	15.3
KAISER STUHL Riesling (4L)	ns	10.0	8.80	2.20	220, 300	120	14.7
STANLEY Rhine Riesling	1992	12.0	8.50	4.25	202, 220, 300	150	14.7
ROSÉ AND LIGHT RED							
STANLEY Australian Beaujolais	1992	12.5	8.50	4.25	220	20	15.7
MATTHEW LANG Australian Beaujolais (bottle)	1992	12.0	4.50	6.00	220	25	15.5
RENMANO Light Dry Red — Nouveau	1992	12.5	8.00	4.00	220	25	15.4
DRY RED							
KOONUNGA HILL Claret (Shiraz Cabernet) (bottle)	1991	13.0	7.50	10.00	220	75	17.8
YALUMBA RESERVE SELECTION Cabernet Sauvignon	1992	11.2	10.00	5.00	220	35	17.3
RENMANO Shiraz Cabernet	1992	12.5	8.00	4.00	220	15	16.8
YALUMBA Shiraz Cabernet	ns	11.0	8.50	4.25	220	40	16.3
RENMANO Hermitage	1992	13.0	8.00	4.00	220	25	15.0
COOLABAH Claret (4L)	ns	12.0	9.50	2.38	220	55	14.4

Below are some wines which were clearly affected by having been in the cask for more than six (but no more than 10) months before the tasting. We've had to pull them out of the rankings.

DRY WHITE

McWILLIAM'S HILLSIDE Chablis	ns	12.0	8.50	4.25	220, 300
RENMANO Sauvignon Blanc	1992	10.5	8.00	4.00	202, 220, 300

RIESLING

McWILLIAM'S HILLSIDE Rhine Riesling	1991	11.0	8.50	4.25	220, 300
RENMANO Rhine Riesling	1992	12.0	8.00	4.00	202, 220, 300

ROSÉ AND LIGHT RED

KAISER STUHL Australian Red Lambrusco (4L)	ns	10.0	8.80	2.20	220
RENMANO Grenache Rosé	1992	10.5	8.00	4.00	202, 220
YALUMBA Vintage Rosé	1992	10.5	8.50	4.25	202, 220, 300

DRY RED

McWILLIAM'S HILLSIDE Shiraz Cabernet	ns	12.5	8.50	4.25	220, 300
STANLEY Shiraz Cabernet	1990	11.5	8.50	4.25	220
YALUMBA RESERVE SELECTION Shiraz	1991	11.2	10.00	5.00	220

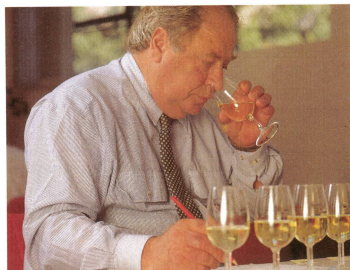
mg/L — milligrams per litre ns — not stated Additives: 202 — potassium sorbate, 220 — sulphur dioxide, 300 — ascorbic acid, 317 — erythorbic acid.

* Prices shown are a good target to aim for — they were obtained in late October 1993 (post Budget price rise) from a major national discount liquor chain, and will undoubtedly be higher in some other shops.

greenish straw colour; nutty aroma; full-flavoured, melon and peach; "The stand-out cask Chardonnay."
straw colour; fresh, floral and fruity aroma; clean but showing little fruit, with a dry, acid finish; "ir everyday drinking."
pale straw colour; stone fruit aroma; some tropical fruit flavours and an acid tang; "Clean and dry but ks fruit depth."
greenish straw colour; fresh, tropical fruit aroma; light but full of flavour; "A touch of sweetness."
aw colour; fruity aroma; dry, well-balanced but not much flavour; "Quaffing style."
straw colour; sappy/honey aroma with a touch of SO ₂ ; broad flavour lacks distinctiveness and finishes short; weet and sour."
d-yellow colour; cardboard aroma lacks freshness; full, soft flavour but little fruit evident; "Broad, soft, but no zing!"
aw colour with slight brown tint; floral, lolly aroma; sweet with floral/spicy flavours; "Sweet and fruity."
greenish straw colour; pungent spicy/floral Traminer aroma; lacks depth from fruit and finishes short, but still stands in this class; "Clean easy-drinking Traminer."
greenish straw colour; light muscat aroma with some SO ₂ showing; sweet, lively and fruity with clean acid sh; "Good with Asian food."
ght yellow colour; developed, toasty bottle-age aroma; more mature riesling flavours — not sugared-up; ruer Rhine Riesling."
greenish straw colour; floral, bubblegum aromas; sweet, fruity but hard; "Fair Traminer."
edium yellow with greenish tinges; citrus aroma with some SO ₂ showing; lemon, light and simple, with acid sh; "Plain Riesling with a citrus tang."
greenish straw colour; light floral and citrus aroma; light and sweet with a short finish; "Bland."
edium yellow colour; aroma is light and fruity but lacking freshness; hard, lean and not much obvious fruit; imple and sweet."
ght red/purple colour; faint berry aroma; light, clean, sugary and fresh but little fruit flavour; "Lambrusco style h lingering sweetness."
edium red colour; spicy fruit aroma; less sugar-driven, with lingering fruit showing; "A light red with legs."
id-red with purple tint; rich berry aroma with a slight burnt character; some fruitiness but a bit hard and light; air light red."
ep medium red colour; big, smoky, aged aroma; rich fruit depth, soft and lingering; "Big and satisfying — arly bottle quality."
id-red colour; blackberry, porty aroma; good depth of flavour, cherry and tannin; "Excellent cask dry red."
id-purple/red colour; jammy, smoky aroma; jammy vanilla oak characters — sweet and full; "Mouth-filling dry red."
arnet colour; spicy and grassy aromas; plummy, thin and hollow; "Lacks definition."
edium red/purple colour; gamey burnt aroma showing some hydrogen sulphide; soft, full palate but lacking rietal definition; "Ordinary."
ght to mid-red colour; dull aroma lacks fruit; thin, light and lacking freshness; "Nondescript."

Brand and type

YALUMBA RESERVE SELECTION Chardonnay
YALUMBA Colombar Semillon Chardonnay
YALUMBA RESERVE SELECTION Chenin Blanc
McWILLIAM'S HILLSIDE Colombar Chardonnay
RENMANO Colombar Semillon Chardonnay
QUEEN ADELAIDE Chardonnay (bottle)
STANLEY Semillon Chardonnay
LINDEMANS Cellar Pack Chablis (4L)
YALUMBA Traminer
McWILLIAM'S HILLSIDE Traminer Riesling
QUEEN ADELAIDE Rhine Riesling (bottle)
STANLEY Traminer Riesling
YALUMBA Rhine Riesling
KAISER STUHL Riesling (4L)
STANLEY Rhine Riesling
STANLEY Australian Beaujolais
MATTHEW LANG Australian Beaujolais (bottle)
RENMANO Light Dry Red — Nouveau
KOONUNGA HILL Claret (Shiraz Cabernet) (bottle)
YALUMBA RESERVE SELECTION Cabernet Sauvignon
RENMANO Shiraz Cabernet
YALUMBA Shiraz Cabernet
RENMANO Hermitage
COOLABAH Claret (4L)



THANKS TO OUR JUDGES

We'd like to thank our panel of expert wine judges for assisting the Consumers' Association with this tasting:

- John Beeston, wine writer.
- Peter Bourne, wine retailer.
- Nick Bulleid, brand manager for Seppelt.
- David Hayman, Regional Manager, BRL Hardy Wine Company.
- Huon Hooke, wine writer for *The Sydney Morning Herald*.
- Rodney Hooper, winemaker for Charles Sturt University.
- Peter Lehmann, winemaker for Peter Lehmann Wines (pictured).
- Andrew Murphy, winemaker for Yalumba.



IN SEARCH OF THE PERFECT BRIE

While the experts on the whole favoured the French variety, it was an Australian-made brie that topped the taste stakes.

FOR SOME PEOPLE, the perfect brie is one made and eaten in France on a warm summer's night with good company, lots of time and a damn fine glass of wine. While this experience is not for sale at your local deli, we do have the balmy weather, summer holidays are just around the corner and there's sure to be a well-stocked bottle shop nearby. But can our local cheesemakers deliver the brie?

The Australian specialty cheese manufacturing industry is only young. We've been making workaday cheeses like cheddar since European settlement, but it's only in the last 10 years or so that our cheesemakers have branched out into bries, blues and other cheeses which are eaten almost purely for the pleasure of it.

Many of the specialty cheeses sold here are imported, but the Australian-made share of the market is growing. In particular, the proportion of locally made surface-ripened cheeses like brie and camembert sold in Australia has increased from almost zero to more than two thirds since the early 1980s. Together, brie and camembert make up the fastest-growing segment of the specialty cheese market and currently hold the largest share.

WHAT MAKES A BRIE?

In the early stages of production most cheese is pretty much the same: soft, white and bland curds. It is largely the particular micro-organisms — bacteria, moulds and yeasts — used to ripen it that give a cheese its characteristic flavour and appearance.

During ripening, the microbes present in the 'green' cheese (or specifically added to it) slowly change its chemical composition. Complex organic molecules (mainly fat and protein) are broken down into simpler, smaller ones by the enzymes of these microbes, affecting the cheese's texture and contributing to its flavour.

To make brie, a coating of white mould, *Penicillium candidum*, is applied to the outside of rounds of green cheese, where it grows. This forms the characteristic white rind, and ripens the cheese from the outside in. Its enzymes slowly penetrate the interior of the cheese, transforming it from a chalky, bland solid into a rich, creamy semi-liquid with a pronounced flavour.

Originally, the specific characteristics of traditional cheeses developed by serendipity — for example, the limestone

caves where Roquefort was ripened were home to one predominant mould which infected the cheese, the Brie region to another — and so particular cheeses could only be made in particular regions. Brie originated in the Ile de France region east of Paris and originally was made on farms with local moulds and from unpasteurised milk, which contributed to strong, complex flavours.

These days, however, strains of the pure culture responsible for a cheese's characteristics are grown in laboratories and are available anywhere in the world. Traditional cheesemaking, using naturally occurring microbes only, is an increasingly rare practice. Traditional bries tend to be dryer when young and far more flowing when mature than non-traditional bries such as those now manufactured in Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere. Non-traditional bries also tend to be milder in flavour.

Camembert, which originated in Normandy, is similar to brie in that it is also ripened from the outside in by application of a white *Penicillium* culture. This similarity can lead to confusion over what the differences, if any, are. In France camembert must be made in smaller rounds, which means the ratio of

THE PRACTICAL STUFF

■ **Buying:** If you haven't bought a particular brand or variety of cheese before, ask to try it before you do. A good seller will usually cut you a piece to taste. Check that its mould, colour and texture look good — see *The perfect brie*, below.

■ **Ripeness:** The use-by date on brie and camembert is a guide to its ripeness. Usually it indicates the date when the cheese is fully mature. You can eat it before this date but its flavour and texture won't be fully developed (see photo below). If you like more flavour, eat brie on its use-by date. It will still be edible after that date, but the flavour will be stronger still, and the texture more runny. By a week or more after the date it may have developed a strong ammonia smell and marks on the mould, and may taste unpleasant.

For most people this brie would probably be too ripe — the cut edge is supposed to bulge slightly when the brie is at its best, not lose its shape entirely!



■ **Storing:** Cheese must be stored in the fridge. Keep it in its original wrapper if possible, sealed so it doesn't dry out. Failing that, wrap brie and camembert in plastic film, and other cheeses in foil. Fresh and soft cheese should be stored away from strong-smelling foods, including other cheeses like blue-vein, as they absorb flavours and odours.

■ **Serving:** Cheese tastes best at room temperature. Take it out of the fridge an hour or so before eating. Brie that doesn't get soft and pliable but remains chalky in the centre is under-ripe.

■ **Eating:** The crust on brie and camembert is edible and can add to the flavour. But if you don't like it, it's quite acceptable to leave it on your plate! Don't eat the waxy rind on cheeses like edam and gouda, however, as it contains mineral hydrocarbons suspected of containing low levels of cancer-causing substances.

surface mould to interior while it's ripening is greater than for brie, and the milk should contain less fat. These differences lead to a distinctly different flavour. Australian-made camembert, however, can actually be more like Australian brie than French camembert.

THE PERFECT BRIE

While the perfect brie for you is simply one you love to eat, in terms of the art of cheesemaking a good brie should look, feel, smell and taste a certain way.

According to Bill Studd (Australia's only member of the *Chevaliers du Taste Fromage de France*, the French brotherhood of cheese tasters), it should be covered in a pure white mould which is soft and velvety and looks and feels alive. When you cut it, the paste should be soft and smooth, bulging rather than runny,

with a sheen on the cut surface. The texture of the paste should be consistent throughout, and the edges should not be hard or dried out. Too many eye holes are a sign of excessive fermentation. It should have a sweet, mushroomy aroma and the flavour should be full and creamy, but with depth and some character. The rind should not be bitter or have a chemical aftertaste.

Not everyone will like 'perfect' brie — the characteristic flavour and aroma of ripe cheese which is tantalising to some is repugnant to others. Like all fermented foods, the process which produces cheese is essentially one of *controlled* spoilage. Certain microbes are encouraged to proliferate in the milk, and later in the green cheese, and they break down the original food.

As the fats and proteins in cheese are

■ **Nutrition:** Cheese is a very good source of calcium, and a good source of protein and vitamins A, D and riboflavin. But it's also a high-fat food and a concentrated source of energy — that is, a little bit contains a lot of kilojoules. Generally, this means it should be enjoyed in small quantities by most people, in even smaller quantities by people who are significantly overweight or have high blood cholesterol levels, and is a good food for people who need a lot of energy, like growing children and adolescents. Some cheeses also contain quite a lot of salt, which you should consider if your diet contains a lot of salty foods, or if you need to reduce your salt intake for health reasons, such as high blood pressure.

■ **Safety:** Soft cheeses like brie are high-risk foods for containing listeria bacteria. If the cheese is contaminated with the bacteria by poor hygiene during cheesemaking or handling, it is an ideal environment for them to grow in as it has a high moisture content and becomes less acid as it matures. We tested all the cheeses in this test for the presence of listeria, and didn't detect any. However, people at high risk of listeria infection — the elderly, the very young, pregnant women and those whose immune system is weakened by drugs or disease — should avoid eating these types of cheese.

■ **Genetically engineered rennet:** Rennet is an essential part of cheesemaking. Animal rennet, an extract of calf stomach, contains the enzyme rennin, which turns the fermented milk that cheese starts out as into junket-like curds. Similar enzymes from vegetable sources (figs, pineapples) and certain micro-organisms are also sometimes used.

Rennet can also be produced by genetic engineering: by inserting a gene from a calf into micro-organisms they can be made to produce large quantities of an enzyme identical to the one from calf stomach. There is no known health risk in this process, but the Consumers' Association is concerned about the possible ramifications genetic engineering may eventually have on human, animal and environmental health. We also believe it is important that foods made using genetically modified organisms should be labelled as such, as consumers have the right to know how their food is produced. If you're concerned about this, or want to avoid rennet sourced from animals, the table on page 22 lists the type of rennet used in the bries we tested.

broken down, the resulting compounds sometimes have a high smell. The same substances are produced when certain foods go off, and also by microbial activity on moist, warm, sheltered areas of human skin. This explains the well-known comparison between a ripe cheese and smelly socks! To the uninitiated, it is hard to understand the appeal of this, but for cheese lovers, the title said to have been bestowed on camembert by surrealist poet Leon-Paul Fargue neatly encapsulates the paradox: *les pieds de Dieu* — the feet of God.

Brie is usually ripened over one to three months, and the longer it is given the stronger the flavour will become. Of course, if it is left too long it will become over-ripe. A distinct, biting smell of ammonia is a sign of over-ripeness. While a small amount of ammonia is a pleasant

HOW CHEESE IS MADE

WHILE there are more than a thousand different types of cheese, they are all made by roughly the same process. It's the variations on this process that produce the particular flavour, colour and texture of each type.

Cheesemaking begins with milk. Cow, sheep or goat's milk is used, and for some cheeses it is skimmed, for others enriched with extra cream. Generally less fat means less flavour. The flavour is also affected by what the animals which produced the milk the cheese is made from were fed on, and the bacteria and enzymes present in the milk.

These days, most cheese is made with pasteurised milk, and all sold in Australia must be. This process destroys the bacteria in milk by heating it. It's become necessary because now cheese is made on a large scale, there's a risk of bacterial contamination while the milk is being transported to the factory. Pasteurisation does affect the quality of the cheese: it slows down the ripening process and inactivates the enzymes in the milk. Some of these

enzymes — which occur naturally in milk as well as in the bacteria which live in it — break down certain fats while the cheese is ripening, contributing to the final flavour. Without them, this doesn't occur to the same extent, and the cheese may lack the complexity and fullness of aroma of those made from raw milk.

The first step in cheesemaking is adding a starter culture to the milk, which ferments it. The culture used differs according to the variety of cheese being made, and affects its flavour, body and texture.

A coagulant — usually rennet — is added next to set the milk, forming curd. This is cut into little pieces and heated to release the whey, the watery part of milk, which is drained away and discarded. The size the curd is cut to depends on the cheese: larger pieces will result in cheese with a high moisture content, tiny pieces will produce a dry cheese. The temperature it is heated to affects the texture: low temperatures for soft curds, high temperatures for rubbery curds.

Cheese is ripened in a variety of ways. There are three main methods: from the surface, with mould or bacteria often sprayed onto the cheese (left, like brie and camembert); with discrete veins of mould, which is added to the green cheese and encouraged to grow by running skewers through the cheese (centre, blue-vein cheese); and throughout the whole cheese, using the original starter culture (right — for example, all hard cheeses).



part of the full aroma of brie and camembert, it should not be easily singled out, or remind you of floor cleaner.

OUR TEST

So which bries are the most enjoyable, and how do the Australian-made brands compare to the imported ones? Do any come close to offering a religious experience? To find out, we gathered together a panel of gourmets and cheese experts to conduct a sensory evaluation of 24 imported and Australian bries. Without their knowing which brand they were sampling, we asked them to assess the aroma, texture, appearance and, most importantly, the flavour of each cheese.

As brie will taste its best when it's at the right stage of ripeness — see *The practical stuff* on page 19 — and has been properly stored and handled, we decided to obtain the cheeses for this test directly from the manufacturers or distributors. We told them we were planning a taste test so that they could supply cheeses they considered to be at their best.

As you can see from the table overleaf, an Australian cheese, KING ISLAND Double Brie, was the top scorer. This re-

sult might be a surprise to our expert panellists, as they were generally critical of Australian bries. Their overall feeling was that the local product lacked the flavour — both in terms of strength and character — of true brie. They felt most of them were fairly bland, dominated by saltiness and creaminess rather than the more complex, full flavours of a 'perfect' French brie. Despite this, those towards the top of the table were considered good, enjoyable cheeses by several panellists.

The French brands we tested did relatively well — all five made it into the top ten — but didn't exactly set off a round of lip-smacking among our panellists either. Although all the cheeses were within their use-by date, two of the French bries were considered 'out of condition'. They tasted old and had developed a grey to green tinge. (Cheese imported from France is shipped to Australia, not flown.)

Overall, however, some of the panellists definitely preferred the French cheeses, and felt they were well-balanced and had more and better flavour than the other cheeses.

New Zealand bries also did relatively

well in our test. KAPITI AORANGI, which was ranked equal fourth, was considered by several panellists to have more character in its flavour than the Australian bries.

OUTLASTING THEIR WELCOME

The unequivocal losers in the taste stakes were the longlife bries we tested. In general these are small rounds of cheese, packed in airtight containers and sold in supermarkets, that have been treated so they have a shelf-life of around 12 months. (Fresh brie normally lasts between four and 12 weeks.)

While this makes them more convenient, especially for retailers, it clearly did nothing for the quality of the three we tested. Our panellists felt the flavour, texture and aroma of the longlife brands bore little resemblance to true brie — one even felt it was pushing the bounds of credibility to call one brand cheese! Comments such as "Like eating fried stale fish in breadcrumbs — avoid at all costs"; "Tastes rubbery, salty and awful"; and simply "Ugh" reveal what they thought they *were* like!

Statistically, there isn't a great deal of difference between the scores given to the

The curd is then treated so it develops the characteristics of the particular cheese variety, and shaped by being pressed into individual cheeses. Stretched-curd cheeses like mozzarella are kneaded and stretched, then moulded.

Salt is added in varying amounts and in various ways, either before or after pressing, and fulfils a variety of functions: it contributes to taste, helps to dehydrate the curd and slows the activity of the starter bacteria to control ripening. Fetta cheese, for example, is salted heavily enough that all bacterial activity is halted and it doesn't ripen; Swiss-type cheeses are soaked in brine but end up containing little salt; hard cheeses like parmesan are rubbed with salt to dry the surface and produce a very hard rind.

Apart from fresh varieties, cheeses are then coated or wrapped, depending on their variety, and allowed to mature under strictly controlled conditions. See *What makes a brie?* on page 18 for a description of what occurs during ripening. The length of time a cheese is ripened again depends on the variety. Soft cheeses ripen faster than hard ones because they contain more moisture, so the bacteria and moulds responsible for the ripening are better able to grow, proliferate and do their work.

top 20 cheeses we tasted, though obviously those closest to the top of the list were liked more. The last four in the table (which include all the longlife brands), however, fall into a different category: they were significantly less liked than the other bries.

WHAT THE 'NON-EXPERTS' THOUGHT

To check whether the opinions of the experts and professional foodies matched the tastes of 'ordinary' folk, we did another sensory evaluation using a panel of staff members who liked brie. This group didn't try all the cheeses, but assessed 16, including the top six and the bottom six, and four from the middle of the range.

The results were very similar to the expert panel's. KING ISLAND Double Brie was again the most liked cheese, and the next three also kept their places. The bottom four also scored lowest in the non-experts' test.

WHY ARE AUSTRALIAN BRIES DIFFERENT?

That Australian bries are different from the French versions is not necessarily bad. A major reason is that cows here feed on different pastures, which pro-

Characteristics of some common cheese types

Type	Aging (months)	Water (%)	Fat (%)	Energy (kJ / cal per 20 g)	Calcium (% of RDI per 20 g)*	Sodium (% of upper RDI per 20 g)*
VERY HARD						
Parmesan	15-18	25	32	355 / 85	27	12
HARD						
Cheddar	3-15	36	34	336 / 81	19	6
Emmental (Swiss)	3-6	38	30	318 / 76	21	3
SEMI-HARD						
Edam	2-6	39	28	300 / 72	21	6
Gouda	3-6	39	30	309 / 74	20	6
SEMI-SOFT						
Brie	1-3	49	29	282 / 68	12	5
Camembert	1-2	52	26	259 / 62	12	6
UNRIPENED						
Cottage	0	73	9	122 / 29	2	2
Ricotta	0	73	9	123 / 30	6	2
Cream	0	52	34	287 / 69	3	4
STRETCHED CURD						
Mozzarella	0	46	23	260 / 63	20	3
PROCESSED						
Processed cheddar	blended	44	28	276 / 66	16	12
OTHER						
Blue vein	4	41	34	319 / 77	14	7
Fetta	1-6	50	25	254 / 61	9	7

* RDI - Recommended dietary intake

duces different milk, resulting in different flavours in the cheese. It also results in a different appearance: French brie tends to be paler in colour where the Australian brands are golden yellow. According to Bill Studd, this is because the cows in France are fed on dry feed for much of the year, whereas in Australia they eat fresh grass almost all year.

We asked some of the Australian cheesemakers what they thought of our finding that locally made brie tended to be a bit bland. In general, they agreed Australian bries are milder than the French ones, but said they believed this was what the Australian palate preferred. While we are fast becoming more sophisticated in our tastes, Australians haven't been as exposed to strong flavours in cheese as Europeans.

Bill Studd's experience lends some support to this view: he used to import a very strong, traditional French brie in very small quantities, but couldn't sell it. In Britain, on the other hand, the same cheese is widely stocked by a major chain of department stores.

It's reasonable to assume, however, that more Australians will develop a taste for bries with more personality and

character than are currently available. And hopefully, Australian cheesemakers will be ready to supply that market.

PRICE

You can expect to pay more for gourmet or specialty cheeses than you would for one you put on sandwiches or pizza. The bries we tested ranged from around \$15 to \$36 per kilo, but there was no correlation between the results of our taste tests and price: the dearest ones were not the most liked. The four dearest were Australian: TIMBOON, a farmhouse cheese, was the most expensive by far, at \$35.90 per kilo. MAFFRA was next, another farmhouse brie, followed by JINDI, also a farmhouse cheese, and HERITAGE.

Even though they are imported, the French bries fell into the middle of the price range. This is partly due to the fact that French cheese producers are subsidised by the European Community by around \$2000 to \$2500 per tonne, and partly the result of economies of scale. Most Australian cheesemakers are still producing relatively small quantities of brie, particularly the farmhouse type, for which everything is done by hand.

Brie

Product

(in order of tasting panels' preference)

Manufacturer/distributor/importer

Origin

Price paid (\$/100 g)

Source of rennet

	KING ISLAND DOUBLE BRIE	King Island Dairies	Australia	2.99	calf
equal	LE ROITELET BRIE	Mayer Imports	France	2.15	calf
	RENOUVEE BRIE	Butterfields Cheese Factors	France	2.37	calf
equal	KAPITI AORANGI	PAT Foods	New Zealand	2.22	microbial — GE
	MAXIM'S BRIE	Butterfields Cheese Factors	France	2.99	calf
	JINDI BRIE	Jindi Cheese	Australia	3.02	microbial (A)
	HERITAGE BRIE	Lactos	Australia	3.00	calf
equal	LE CHAMPANET BRIE	Botany Foods	France	2.55	calf
	MARCILLAT BRIE	Menora Gourmet Products	France	2.04	microbial — natural
	SOUTH CAPE BRIE	Butterfields Cheese Factors	Australia	2.40	microbial — natural
	FERDALE NEW ZEALAND BRIE	Capital Foods	New Zealand	2.75	calf
	BRANCOURTS BRIE	Brancourts	Australia	2.39	microbial — GE
equal	TIMBOON BRIE	Timboon Farmhouse Cheese	Australia	3.59	vegetable
	WATTLE VALLEY DOUBLE BRIE	Jindi Cheese	Australia	2.97	microbial (A)
	UNICORN FROMAGE DE BRIE	Unicorn Cheese/Frenchese	Australia	2.40	calf or GE
	UNICORN MINI BRIE	Unicorn Cheese/Frenchese	Australia	1.96	calf or GE
	MARGARET RIVER BRIE	Margaret River Cheese Company	Australia	2.50	microbial — GE
	CLOVER CREEK BRIE	Butterfields Cheese Factors	Australia	2.39	microbial — natural
equal	MAFFRA FARMHOUSE BRIE	Maffra Farmhouse Cheeses	Australia	3.28	calf
	UNICORN SPECIALITY BRIE	Unicorn Cheese/Frenchese	Australia	2.39	calf or GE
	RIVIANA BRIE (L)	Mainland Dairies	Denmark	2.09	calf
	WARWICK BRIE	SC & W Co-operative Dairy Association	Australia	1.50	microbial (A)
	PRESIDENT BRIE (L)	Cypress & Sons	Austria	1.75	microbial — natural
	AUSTRALIAN BRIE (L)	Lactos	Australia	2.16	calf

L - Longlife cheese GE - Genetically engineered (A) Natural or GE (manufacturer didn't specify)

What to look out for: our five top bries.



Panelists' comments	Total score (%)	Product (in order of tasting panels' preference)
Good flavour: some felt it had character, others that it needed more guts.	70	KING ISLAND DOUBLE BRIE
Well made, with some depth and fullness of flavour.	68	LE ROITELET BRIE
Creamy, rich flavour and good mushroom aroma, according to some; for others it lacked flavour.	68	RENOMMÉE BRIE
Most found it enjoyable, a bit more flavour than most.	67	KAPITI AORANGI
Well made; quite good flavour but seemed to be old.	67	MAXIM'S BRIE
Some found it smooth and enjoyable, others bland and boring.	64	JINDI BRIE
Long ammonia, suggesting sample was past its prime. Stronger flavour; salty.	63	HERITAGE BRIE
Good, interesting flavour, but seemed to be old.	63	LE CHAMPANET BRIE
Good flavour with character, according to some; others found it bland.	63	MARCELLAT BRIE
Cracking in flavour, very creamy.	63	SOUTH CAPE BRIE
Some potential to develop more flavour, but sample considered under-ripe.	59	FERNDALE NEW ZEALAND BRIE
Well made, clean flavour but lacks depth and character.	58	BRANCOURTS BRIE
Bland and boring.	58	TIMBOON BRIE
Sample considered in poor condition, but had some flavour.	58	WATTLE VALLEY DOUBLE BRIE
For some it had reasonable flavour; others found it bitter and unpleasant.	57	UNICORN FROMAGE DE BRIE
After, which most found unpleasant, though some thought it OK.	55	UNICORN MINI BRIE
Creamy with little complexity and depth of flavour. Not unpleasant but unexciting.	54	MARGARET RIVER BRIE
Very bland, with little aroma or character.	53	CLOVER CREEK BRIE
Salty, runny, cloying; flavour faults.	53	MAFFRA FARMHOUSE BRIE
Bland and rubbery.	53	UNICORN SPECIALITY BRIE
No taste, no body: "a product of technology".	46	RIVIANA BRIE (L)
Badly made: under-ripe in centre, yet mould seemed too old.	44	WARWICK BRIE
Most thought it unpleasant and nothing like brie.	42	PRESIDENT BRIE (L)
No-one enjoyed it; nothing like brie.	41	AUSTRALIAN BRIE (L)



Tasting 24 bries is hard work, even for cheese lovers. Our grateful thanks to the people who made up our panel of expert tasters, for their knowledge, experience and also their endurance! They were (left to right):

- William Studd, *Chevalier du Taste Fromage* and cheese importer.
- Alan Saunders, Presenter/producer, *The Food Program*, Radio National (standing).
- David Keldie, National Sales Manager, Butterfields Cheese Factors.
- Paul Ford, Technical manager, Bonlac Foods (standing).
- Cav Ubriehien, dairy technologist (retired) and Senior Judge, NSW Royal Agricultural Society.
- Iain Hewitson, television chef, *Healthy, Wealthy and Wise*.
- Helen Greenwood, Editor, 'Good Living', *The Sydney Morning Herald*.
- Richard Thomas, cheesemaker.

Total score
This score is based on the sensory evaluation conducted by an expert panel which included a food writer, a cheesemaker, a cheese grader, cheese importers and distributors, and a chef. The evaluation was conducted blind — the panellists didn't know which cheeses they were tasting — and each panellist scored each cheese on its:

- Condition and presentation: 25%.
- Body and texture: 25%.
- Flavour and aroma: 50%.

Flavour and aroma were given the most weight, as this is the most important thing from the consumer's point of view. The scores from each panellist were added together to give the total score.

You and your dentist



Dentist, *n.* A prestidigitator who, putting metal into your mouth, pulls coins out of your pocket. — *Ambrose Bierce, The Devil's Dictionary*

DENTISTS probably strike fear into the heart of the average person more than any other profession, possibly more than anything. You can avoid funnelwebs, sharks and dark alleyways but you know you're going to have to visit the dentist sooner or later, listen to the whining drill as you sit in the waiting room and watch the pained expressions on people's faces as they leave. You never feel quite so vulnerable as in a dentist's chair.

However, dental health has improved markedly in the last 10 to 20 years. In 1977 the typical 12-year-old had four to five permanent teeth that were decayed, missing or filled. By 1989 this figure had fallen to between one and two teeth on average. In fact nearly half of all children this age had no decay in their teeth at all.

There are many reasons for this improvement. Fluoridation of water is usually touted as one of the big reasons, but dental health has improved in non-fluoridated areas as well, so other factors such as improved dental education and fluoride in toothpaste have also played a significant part.

A trip to the dentist

Visiting the dentist regularly is as much a part of good dental care as brushing and flossing regularly. Early diagnosis of

decay gives an opportunity to treat it without using fillings and hence preserve the original structure of the tooth. Children should start visiting the dentist around the age of two or three and from then on you should go at least once a year for a check-up — possibly once every six months if you have problems with your teeth.

When you make a regular visit to the dentist, you can typically expect an examination and maybe a polish as well. The dentist should explain all treatments beforehand and what they cost. If you have any questions it's best to ask them before he or she starts the treatment and you have a mouthful of fingers and sharp implements to contend with.

Occasionally your dentist may want to take x-rays of your teeth, particularly for future reference if it's your first visit. The rest of your body should be shielded from the radiation with a lead apron. Children under eight years old shouldn't be given x-rays without a good reason.

If you have lots of tooth trouble, it's possible the dentist may want to take x-rays on a fairly regular basis.

Some work may be done by someone other than a dentist. For instance, most primary schoolchildren have access to school dental services, and much of this treatment is provided by dental thera-

pists working under the general control of a dentist. Dental hygienists usually work for dentists in private practice and provide simple services (scaling and cleaning teeth, for example) to patients of all ages.

There has been talk of combining the two professions (hygienists and therapists) into one, and a group in WA is currently pushing for a combined three-year degree course and changes to the legislation to allow self-employment. They claim they will be able to perform simple services at a reduced cost.

Safety

Adding to the fearful reputation of dentists are regular scare stories about mercury poisoning from your amalgam fillings, fluoride poisoning and the chance of transmission of HIV or some other dread disease.

■ Mercury poisoning from amalgam fillings is an issue that raises its head on a regular basis. It is a major concern for the profession, and the Australian Dental Association (ADA) has strict guidelines for its handling and storage. But it's not perceived to be a big danger to the people with the fillings in their mouths.

Mercury can be released in tiny amounts from amalgam fillings when you chew or brush your teeth, but your

greatest intake will probably occur when the filling is put in or taken out. However, whether the effect is enough to be toxic or not is still unclear. Recent studies in Sweden found no real links between amalgam fillings and increased ill-health, although there was evidence of a few people experiencing rashes in the mouth from a hypersensitive reaction.

The greatest potential danger from mercury poisoning is to unborn children, so to be on the safe side pregnant women should avoid having any amalgam work done until after the pregnancy.

There are alternatives to amalgam fillings but they are all more expensive and often don't last as long. However, if you already receive a high exposure to mercury (for example, you work in a dental surgery or smelter), they are definitely worth considering. Ask your dentist for advice.

■ There is very strong evidence that fluoride helps strengthen the teeth and prevent tooth decay. For this reason it is added to many toothpastes, dentists use it as a preventive treatment and it is added to most people's water in Australia. A high fluoride intake can lead to fluorosis, a mottling of the teeth, and an excessively high intake can result in poisoning. However, even if you live in an area with fluoridated water it's unlikely the levels you get from water, toothpaste, the dentist and other natural sources put together will have any detrimental effects.

It seems probable fluoride has its biggest effect on teeth when they are actually pushing through the gum, so it is at this age fluoride is most effective. If you live in an unfluoridated area you can take fluoride supplements, but recent research has shown this carries a much higher risk of fluorosis. It's possible the harmful effects of fluoride come from getting large amounts at once rather than small amounts on a regular basis. Ask your dentist for advice if you live in an unfluoridated area and want to use supplements for children under the age of three. Taking supplements between the ages of three and six may also be beneficial, but using toothpaste containing fluoride could be just as effective.

■ A *Four Corners* program in August this year raised the question of HIV transmission via the dentist. This topic first came to prominence in the United States with the Acer-Bergalis case, where a patient claimed he had been infected with HIV by a dentist and at least four others subsequently claimed to have been infected by the same Dr Acer.

The Australian Dental Association says both it and the National Health and

Medical Research Council (NHMRC) have guidelines for prevention of transmission of HIV and other blood-borne viruses. These include using gloves, disposable or freshly sterilised equipment for each patient, regular flushing of water and air lines, and keeping material that can be contaminated separate from that which can't.

So, for example, before your dentist sticks anything in your mouth, he or she should set chair and light positions and determine what instruments will be needed so there is no need to touch anything that should remain 'clean' during the examination or operation. Once the treatment is finished your dentist should wash his or her hands before adjusting the chair or touching any 'clean' objects.

What should you pay?

According to the Australian Dental Association there are no set fees for dentists. However, a survey of fees by the ADA in December 1989 found the cost of a simple examination could be any-

where between nothing and \$66. The table overleaf gives you an indication of the cost of seven common services and the amounts you could get back from your health fund if you have dental cover.

Dental care is usually covered by ancillary health insurance and is separate from hospital cover. It's unlikely you'll get back the full cost of the service; depending on what your dentist charges, you'll probably get around 50% to 60%.

If you have good healthy teeth you're probably better off just paying for a yearly trip to the dentist out of your own pocket. If you have troublesome teeth or a family, dental cover could well buffer you somewhat if you're suddenly hit with huge dental bills. Make sure you find out exactly what's covered before you take out the policy. The report on health insurance in the November 1992 issue of CHOICE lists policies which offer good ancillary cover at a fairly cheap price.

If you suddenly need to find a dentist

A MOUTHFUL OF JARGON

■ **Amalgam** is a substance used in fillings. It is an alloy of mercury, silver, tin, copper and zinc.

■ **Caries** are pockets of decay in teeth. If they extend right through the enamel they reach the soft pulp inside and lead to toothache.

■ **Composite** fillings are an alternative to amalgam fillings if the decayed area is small or there is little or no stress on the filling. They're white so good for use on the outside surfaces of front teeth, but they generally aren't as good in your back teeth, where they wear easily.

■ **The crown** is the part of the tooth above the surface (the root being the part below). If you break or chip a tooth you can get an artificial crown made, but the procedure is expensive and takes a few visits.

■ **Enamel**, the outer layer of teeth, is the hardest substance in the human body.

■ **Fluoride** is added to the water in many parts of Australia and is used by dentists to help reduce the incidence of decay. See *Safety*, left, for more information.

■ **Orthodontics** is a specialist dental discipline that involves straightening teeth. The best known orthodontic device is braces.

■ **Periodontics** involves the areas supporting the teeth such as the gums and the bone. The same bacteria that cause tooth decay also attack the gums. If your gums are swollen or bleed when you

brush your teeth this indicates an infection that if untreated could lead to periodontal disease.

■ **Plaque** is a thin film of food containing millions of bacteria that coats the teeth. When the bacteria come in contact with most sugars and other carbohydrates in our food, they release acids which attack the surface of the teeth and eventually lead to decay.

■ **Root canal therapy** involves replacing the inside of a dead tooth while retaining the outer surface. It is quite expensive and may take a few visits.

■ **Tartar (or calculus)** is plaque that has been left on the teeth, has subsequently hardened and can only be removed by a dentist. Brushing and flossing are usually sufficient to prevent it.

■ **Toothpaste** contains small abrasive particles (around 25% to 60% of the paste) that scour plaque from the surface, plus water and various additives. Most of these make it taste nice or stop it going off, but some additives like fluoride actually help strengthen the teeth.

■ **Xylitol** is a naturally occurring sugar that doesn't appeal to the bacteria in plaque. A study of Finnish confectionery and bakery workers found the use of chewing gum containing xylitol could reduce the level of tooth decay (which was high to start with) in these workers and may be useful for people in similar environments.

(because you don't go regularly and find yourself with toothache, for example) you won't know from the phone book what quality of treatment they offer. Try to get recommendations from friends or relatives, then ring these dentists up and ask what they charge for a consultation and for a filling. This way you should be able to combine good treatment with a reasonable price.

Free dental care

It is possible to get free dental care from some public dental clinics, but the service is usually means-tested or restricted to people with Health Care cards. However, the waiting lists for this care can be very long, particularly in NSW, Victoria, SA and the ACT. A report from the National Health Strategy last year recommended a dental program be established to improve access to basic dental care for people on low incomes. The report revealed that while 50% of the general population in any year visit a dentist, only 25% or so of people with Health Care cards will do the same. The report also noted that poorer people seem more likely to have decayed teeth than richer ones.

In the UK, dental treatment comes under the National Health Service (NHS — its equivalent of Medicare). The system is complicated, but essentially everyone can get a free dental check-up, and other free treatments are available if you're under 18, on a pension, on a low income or pregnant. For people who don't qualify for other free treatments the NHS may cover part of the cost of treatment. The Australian Dental Association is emphatic that there should be no dental equivalent of Medicare in Australia.

Prevention better than cure

The root cause of most dental problems is plaque. If you can stop it eating away at the teeth, trips to the dentist need not be so traumatic. There are five surfaces to a double tooth; three exposed and two butted up against neighbouring teeth. Regular brushing helps reduce the amount of plaque on the exposed surfaces, while regular flossing will clean the abutting surfaces. On top of that regular visits to the dentist will help nip any problems in the bud.

If you have a complaint about a dentist you can take it to your state Dental Board, your state branch of the ADA or, if you're in Queensland, NSW or Victoria, your state's health complaints unit or Health Rights Commission. □

Dental charges and rebates

Service (ADA schedule number)

Periodic examination (012)

Consultation (014)

X-ray, two films (023)

Scale and clean (112)

Amalgam filling, two surfaces (512)

Composite filling, one surface, back tooth (531)

Porcelain/gold crown (615)

1

What you pay (\$)

14-27

16-33

27-43

32-53

45-65

41-69

580-860

2

What you get back (\$)

10-19

10.50-19

16-32

19-37

28-48

25-45

265-500

Service

We chose six services that are among the most common undertaken, plus an expensive service (a crown) that is fairly common. The services are as follows (with their Australian Dental Association schedule number in brackets):

■ Periodic oral examination (012). This is your basic regular check-up, for people who go to the dentist every six or 12 months.

■ Consultation (014). This is a dental examination when you have a problem (toothache, broken filling, etc), rather than a regular check-up.

■ X-ray — two films (023). This is a particular form of x-ray, known as a 'bitewing', that shows upper and lower teeth on one side of the jaw. In this example two films are taken, typically covering both sides of the jaw.

■ Scale and clean (112). Also known as 'scale and polish', this involves the removal of hard deposits from the teeth, often followed by a polish.

■ Amalgam filling — two surfaces (512). A double tooth has five surfaces, one on the outside of the jaw, one on the inside, one on the top plus two surfaces next to the teeth on either side. This procedure typically involves a filling covering the top and one of the sides of a permanent tooth. See *Safety* on page 24 for more information on amalgam fillings.

■ Composite filling — back tooth, one surface (531). A resin is sometimes used in place of amalgam to fill a small cavity in the tooth.

■ Porcelain/gold crown (615). This is an option if you break a tooth completely. The base of the tooth is made of gold and is covered in a porcelain jacket. The technique involves multiple appointments.

1

What you pay

These figures are based on the average range found by the Australian Dental Association in a survey in December 1989, and adjusted for inflation since then. There are no recommended fees for dental services so they aren't an indication of what you should be paying, rather a case of what you're likely to be paying.

Typically fees are slightly cheaper in Queensland and Tasmania than other states and a bit more expensive in NSW and the ACT.

2

What you get back

The amount you'll get back from your health insurance differs depending on which company you're insured with, which policy you take out with that company and which state you're in. Our survey here doesn't cover all those variables, but it should give you an idea of what to expect back from your health insurance. The higher figures generally involve higher premiums.



THE TOOTHBRUSH USED BY DENTISTS

"More dentists use ORAL-B in preference to any other brand of toothbrush — Hoare Wheeler Research Survey."

When a dentistry lecturer at the University of Western Australia saw this claim he wrote to the company asking for details. When it declined he decided to conduct his own survey as part of his course for undergraduates. Questionnaires were mailed to all Western Australian members of the Australian Dental Association, from which he got 248 responses. The results were published in the *Australian Dental Journal*.

The results showed 76% of dentists did use ORAL-B for brushing their teeth. The next most popular brand was SENSODYNE, used by 17%. These figures included people who used more than one brand.

However, the researchers also asked whether the dentists received free toothbrushes as professional samples from the manufacturers. Nearly 80% did, and of these 78% had received samples of ORAL-B. Five other brands were also distributed free to dentists in significant numbers, but they only reached 25% to 38% of those who had received any free samples.

So while the claim seems to be true, maybe they should amend it to, "The toothbrush used by most dentists is the one they get the most free samples of."



GREEN PAGE

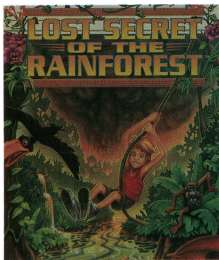
ON-SCREEN ADVENTURES IN THE RAINFOREST

HOW DO YOU put out the fire in the bird's nest and save the egg? Will the pitcher plant a few branches up help? Maybe, but how can Adam walk past the stinking Hoatzin bird to get to them?

These and many others are the problems you must solve in *The Lost Secret of the Rainforest*, a green-tinged computer game from Sierra (recommended price \$79.95, for use with a VGA or EGA monitor; check other requirements before you buy). Adam and his father arrive in Peru ready for an expedition into the Amazon to develop ecologically sound products with native tribes. But when his father's suitcase is stolen, the adventure in the rainforest begins.

The game's a refreshing change from the blowing-up-tanks variety, and whether they sink in or not the environmental messages are there: pollution is bad, picking up litter is good and so on.

It's not an easy game, but it's fun and promises to keep adults and children alike busy for perhaps days (you can save



your game and pick it up later where you left off). It certainly kept one of our computer buffs occupied as well as getting the thumbs-up from 10-year-old Sarah and her younger brother Tom.

The graphics are charming — colourful humming birds fly across the screen, snakes slither down trunks, boats drift down waterways.

STOP PRESS! Although they'd finally worked their way out of several tight situations, the game came to an abrupt halt for two adult players at what seemed to be only halfway through: "Pity, because we enjoyed it up till then." When we contacted the retailer about this we were told we could purchase a 'hint book' for \$15, which would get us out of any problems we encountered. Our players decided to buy the book, only to have to order it and wait for it to arrive. We wonder how many children would maintain their interest in the game through delays (and extra costs) like this.

GREEN DOT SCHEME ALMOST BINNED

GOOD intentions alone don't make recycling schemes work. As the near-collapse of Germany's Green Dot scheme shows yet again, markets for the end goods — and money to keep the scheme moving — are just as important.

The scheme started in 1991 after legislation made manufacturers responsible for the recovery and disposal of packaging. Over 3000 manufacturers formed a private company, DSD (Duales System Deutschland), to collect and recycle their packaging. Member companies paid fees to DSD and put the Green Dot logo on their products.

But the scheme was blighted by two very different problems. First, German consumers took to washing, sorting and putting out the packaging with admirable enthusiasm; the industry couldn't deal with the volume of material collected. The result was an environment minister calling for the incineration of 70 000 tonnes of plastic without a market, and surplus paper being exported to neighbouring countries such as France, distorting its paper prices and causing protests in the streets of Paris, Strasbourg and Lille.

The second and more immediate problem for DSD was the manufacturers who did not pay their fees. DSD in turn owed collectors and local government 870 million marks (about the same figure in Australian dollars). In September this year, DSD faced bankruptcy.

After hours of negotiations — one session, which yielded nothing, lasted 16 hours — a short-term compromise was found. Those owed money by DSD agreed to treat the sums as loans to be repaid at low interest. Retailers agreed to co-operate with DSD in its efforts to collect fees.

In the wake of the crisis, critics are calling for a review of packaging legislation, incineration of certain materials and perhaps even banning of some plastics. DSD is still trying to squeeze money out of the hanger-on manufacturers (or 'Trittbrettfahrer', a word which among other meanings describes people riding on the back of an old-fashioned garbage truck) who are still using the Green Dot logo on their products but are not paying towards disposal.

THE WEARING OF THE GREEN

THE Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) has released a range of Australian-made women's casual clothing called Earth Works. It is claimed to be dyed using 60% less water and 50% less energy, and to produce 30% less dye effluent than conventional processes.

The range features 40 items in cotton knit including leggings, long-sleeved T-shirts and hooded tops in colours such as terracotta, blue and sage green. Prices are between \$40 and \$55.

"Clothing manufacture is one of the most polluting processes in the world," says Earth Works product manager Nicole O'Brien. "In our process over 95% of the dye is absorbed by the fabric, so there is virtually no waste."

The women's collection will be followed by a men's this coming winter and children's after that. The ACF is also developing an organic cotton clothing range including, for example, a cable-knit cotton jumper for \$130. Earth Works clothing is available in all states; call the ACF's head office on (03) 416 1166 for your nearest stockist.



DRIVELINES

CAR PASSENGER AIRBAGS: TREAT WITH RESPECT

Passenger airbags are coming — they're a great safety improvement but you may have to adjust your habits if they're to protect and not injure you.

LIKE A LIGHT, fluffy pillow filled with air!" That's the impression you might have from television and press advertisements picturing an airbag inflating.

But it's not fun hitting an airbag. According to Michael Griffiths of NSW Roads and Traffic Authority's Crashlab, "If you're leaning against an airbag unit when it goes off, the force hitting you is approximately equivalent to an impact of 80 kilometres per hour." It's a fisted glove when expanding. "It's quite violent in deployment," says Jack Haley, a research engineer with NSW's NRMA.

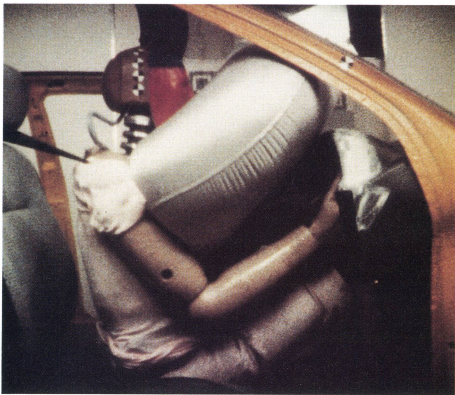
In Europe there was great concern when a two-year-old child was killed by an expanding passenger airbag during a 20 km/h accident. The infant was standing on his father's lap — both unrestrained by seatbelts — in the front passenger seat of a car. Probably the infant would have died anyway, and there's certainly no point blaming the airbag for such carelessness. But were you aware just how powerful and potentially dangerous an airbag can become?

DRIVERS KEEP THEIR DISTANCE

"An airbag has two aims," says Ron de Forest of the RACV, "to reduce pressure on the chest against the seatbelt, and to stop the head hitting the steering wheel or dashboard."

There's no real problem for drivers because the distance between driver and airbag is sufficient for the inflation force to be over by the time the head hits the bag. In fact the bag is full of holes — or made from porous material — so it will begin to deflate as soon as it has completed expanding. It's designed to collapse as the occupant hits it.

It is in collapsing that the airbag absorbs energy from the collision. It's all



You're supposed to hit an airbag as it's starting to deflate — hitting it while it's still inflating is approximately equivalent to an impact at 80 km/h. Moral for passengers: don't put your feet up on the dash in cars with a passenger airbag!

over faster than lightning, in less than half a second, from activation to total collapse of the bag.

And it doesn't take a major crash for the airbag to activate: it may be set off during a collision of between 15 and 25 kilometres per hour.

But passengers sit in all sorts of positions, even if wearing a seatbelt. They may be leaning forward getting something out of the glovebox, maybe even with their feet up on the dash. What happens to them if the airbag goes off

then? They will be hit by the airbag during expansion. There could be serious injury if, for example, the occupant's legs are thrown back while their hips are held firmly by the seatbelt.

These people would probably be injured anyway in a collision if they're not sitting upright and belted in firmly. But what are the implications for airbag design? And are consumers being educated about the risks as well as the benefits of airbags?

US AND EUROPEAN WAYS

There's more of a danger from airbags in Europe and North America for two reasons:

- Fewer people use seatbelts.
- Rear-facing child restraints — which are fitted to the dashboard fascia — are popular.

You can imagine what would happen if a passenger airbag went off hard up against the back of a child's seat! However, we're not likely to see these child seats in Australia due to local Standards and the way child safety and products have developed here. Nevertheless, you may want to bear this risk in mind if travelling overseas with infants.

We're not suggesting there's anything wrong with passenger airbags. The important point is to raise community awareness about airbags and bad safety habits.

"You've got to keep it in perspective," says Ron de Forest. "There will always be people who misuse technology, whether a seatbelt or an airbag. A few people may die, but lots more will be saved. The net gain is positive. But an airbag is not a miracle cure."

KNOW WHAT YOU'RE UP AGAINST

Where are things headed? European manufacturers look like introducing a dashboard sticker to warn against the use of rear-facing child restraints where an airbag is fitted. We'll probably get the stickers here too, on imported cars. But perhaps there should be a more general warning in Australia? That issue hasn't been resolved.

Meanwhile, what should you do? If you're in a car with a passenger airbag fitted, make sure you're not putting yourself at needless risk. This can happen if:

- You lean forward.
- You rest your feet on the dashboard.
- You don't use the seatbelt properly.
- You carry something on your lap — it can pass the force on to you.
- You share your seatbelt with someone else. □

WHICH CARS HAVE PASSENGER AIRBAGS?

Cars available in Australia with passenger airbags include the Honda NSX and Legend, Lexus 400LS, Nissan Infiniti, Mercedes S class plus all mid-range sizes (220, 240, etc) and as an option on the 190. They are not yet available in other European cars such as Audi, BMW, Saab or Volvo.

The 10th CHOICE Subscriber Draw

For new subscriptions and renewals received October 1 to December 31, 1993.

Subscriber draws are now held quarterly and on January 4 we'll be holding our tenth. The lucky winner will be able to choose any two products from the following tests, published April 1993 to June 1993.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Portable TVs (April 1993) | ☐ Shampoo vacuum cleaners (May 1993) |
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These are products we bought for testing, so you won't be the first to turn them on or set them up. But we'll cover any service problems with a CHOICE warranty that'll match the manufacturers' — just as if you'd bought them new.

All new CHOICE subscriptions and renewals received from members and personal subscribers (including donors of gift subscriptions) by December 31 will go into the draw, unless of course you indicate you don't want to be included.

(If you're not due to renew your subscription during the period, don't worry, we'll be holding other draws during the year — your renewal notice will have the details. And if you're on a two-year subscription you'll be entered on your first anniversary as well as when you renew again.)

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Use the order form overleaf

CONDITIONS OF ENTRY

1. The winner will be drawn from new subscriptions and renewals from personal subscribers (including members and donors of gift subscriptions) received October 1 to December 31, 1993. If you opt for a 2-year subscription, you'll be entered on your first anniversary as well as when you actually renew or subscribe.
2. Information on how to enter and prizes forms part of these conditions of entry.
3. Employees, and their immediate families, of the Australian Consumers' Association and its associated companies and agencies are ineligible to enter.
4. Entrants must be residents of Australia.
5. Applications are subject to a verification check and judge's decision is final. No correspondence will be entered into.
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7. Prizes cannot be taken as cash.
8. South Australian residents may enter the draw by completing the form and posting to: Reply Paid No. 13, ACA, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, without subscribing to the magazine. Only one entry per person is permissible through this method.
9. Last date for receipt of entries to the draw is December 31, 1993. No responsibility accepted for lost, late or misdirected mail.
10. The draw will be conducted at the office of the Consumers' Association at 10 am on January 4, 1994.
11. The winner will be notified by letter and published in the March 1994 issue of CHOICE magazine.
12. The promoter is Australian Consumers' Association, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204.
NSW Permit No. TC93/3740, Vic Raffles & Bingo Permits Board Permit No. 93/2426 issued on 23/8/93, ACT Permit No. TP93/1430 issued under the Lotteries Ordinance, NT No. NT93/1131.

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To help you get the right person as quickly as possible CHOICE has upgraded its telephone system. So here are two important numbers that will get you directly to the service you need:

Consumer Information Service:

(02) 559 98

For free help with a consumer problem, an update on past product tests.

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For enquiries about subscription or to order books from our Consumer Bookshelf.

Consumer Rights Advice

CHOICE operates consumer rights lines for people having problems with a faulty product or a dispute with a service person. These lines set out what your basic rights are and what steps you can take to protect them. These lines are also available in four languages other than English — Vietnamese, Arabic, Chinese and Turkish.

CHOICE Consumer Rights Advice:

0055 200

Advice in Vietnamese: 0055 2000

Advice in Turkish: 0055 2000

Advice in Chinese: 0055 2001

Advice in Arabic: 0055 2001

Youth lines

A line specifically for young consumers, the 'Ripped-off' Line, outlines your shopping rights as well as letting you know what you can do if you run into problems with something you have bought.

Students can also call a resource line to find out where to get up-to-date information on the consumer movement and the environment. These two topics are the most requested by students and teachers who ring our Consumer Information Service.

CHOICE 'Ripped-off' Line — Advice for

Young Consumers: 0055 2000

CHOICE Student Resource Guide: 0055 2001

Product advice

A number of product lines also summarise what to look for when you are buying a particular product. Brand-name recommendations are not included, however — these remain exclusive to CHOICE subscribers.

CHOICE Washing Machine Advice:

0055 2001

CHOICE Water Filter Advice: 0055 2001

CHOICE Baby Products Advice: 0055 2001

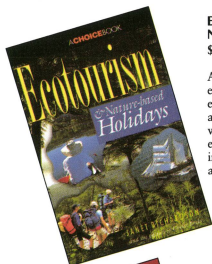
CHOICE Safer Domestic

Pest Control Advice: 0055 2001

Calls attract a rate of 55 cents per minute.

CONSUMER BOOKSHELF

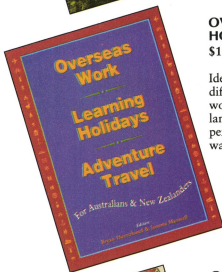
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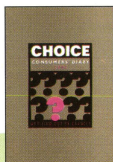
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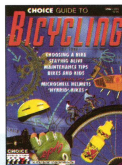
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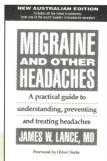
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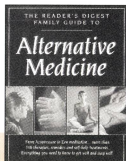
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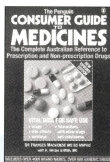
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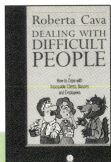
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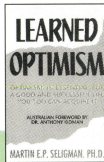
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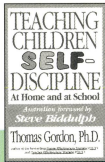
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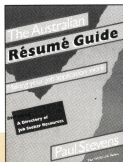
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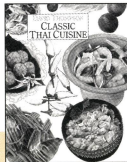
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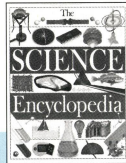
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CONSUMER IN LAW

MEDICAL RIGHTS

Access to health care, informed consent, the right to refuse treatment, making complaints... where do consumers stand in all this?

TRADITIONALLY, courts have been reluctant to recognise or create rights for patients. Such rights, it's been argued, could interfere with the doctor/patient relationship (patients might become less trusting, doctors less in control). It's also been argued that in times of illness consumers are too emotional and insufficiently expert to decide for themselves the best course of action.

In addition there is a fear that Australians given legal rights might become as litigious as their American cousins. Innovation might be stifled, and doctors might not want to perform risky procedures if their chances of being sued increased.

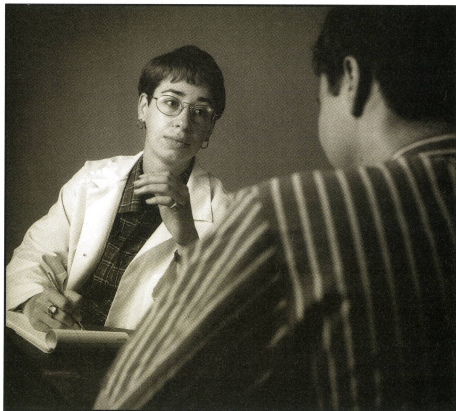
On the other hand, it's accepted that aggrieved consumers are less likely to take the matter to court if they've other options. And findings suggest better-informed consumers take more responsibility for their health and are more accepting of catastrophes if the risks and benefits of treatment are discussed with them first.

Nevertheless, health consumers in Australia have little legal protection. One important right which is legally recognised centres around informed consent.

What is 'informed consent'?

'Informed consent' isn't actually defined in law, yet it's the backbone of patients' rights. What the High Court *has* said is that doctors have an obligation to exercise reasonable care in the provision of information, advice and warnings.

After awarding damages last year to a woman who had been blinded by the treatment she received (about a one in 2000 chance), the High Court stated: "A doctor has a duty to warn a patient of a material risk inherent in the proposed treatment." A material risk is one which the patient would consider significant. In this case the woman said if she had known there was any risk of this happen-



ing she wouldn't have agreed to the treatment.

'Informed consent' is a shorthand expression meaning the patient has consented to treatment freely after having received an adequate explanation, in terms and language he or she can understand, of:

■ The nature of his/her ill health and the likelihood of his/her return to good health.

■ The details of any proposed procedures and therapies as well as possible alternatives including:

- expected outcomes
- common after-effects and adverse effects
- chances of success
- material risks

- costs and availability
- whether the procedure is experimental or to be used in research
- the results of any procedures which have already been carried out and the implications of those results
- the possible consequences of not taking the health worker's advice; and
- the name, position, qualifications and experience of the health workers who are carrying out the procedures.

Although the above criteria are not defined in law, similar criteria are recognised by various health authorities (including the National Health and Medical Research Council) and would carry considerable weight if you wanted to argue a case with your doctor or hospital.

Other 'rights' are not as clear.

Do I have the right to appropriate, quality health care whenever I need it?

Under Medicare you can expect to have access to a basic range of public hospital services regardless of where you live in Australia; to receive treatment on the basis of your clinical need — regardless of your financial or health insurance status — and to be given a choice to receive public hospital services free of charge as a public patient.

If you have an established relationship with your doctor he or she is required to respond to an emergency. Failure to assist could be deemed to be misconduct unless there's a good reason for not attending.

In other cases if you could show a doctor had discriminated against you because of your marital status, sex, race, physical or intellectual impairment or homosexuality you might have a case in some states with anti-discrimination law.

Do I have the right to determine what happens to me?

The law in Australia does not explicitly state that as a patient you have the right to determine what happens to you (unlike in some parts of the US, where such a right is legally recognised). However, because health services are usually sought voluntarily, and because patients can sue for assault if they're treated without consent (or for negligence if not treated adequately), the implication is that you do have the right to determine what happens to you.

Involuntary psychiatric patients and people deemed to be not capable of making a decision for themselves have fewer rights, and the decision about what will happen to them (within limits) is in their guardian's or doctor's hands.

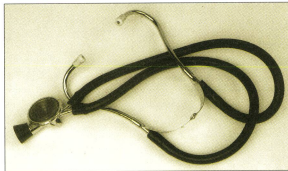
What treatment can be given without my consent?

In most states hospital authorities can legally act to save your life in an emergency if you are incapable of giving consent. If you tried to refuse treatment in an emergency you might well be judged to be mentally unbalanced and treated anyway.

Additionally, most states have legislation which allows hospital authorities to give a child a blood transfusion if the parent(s) withhold consent.

In general your consent is not required when the treatment is authorised by law. Compulsory blood testing on traffic accident patients is one example.

Another exception is if you're suffering from a highly contagious disease such as typhoid or tuberculosis. In that



Health consumers in Australia have little legal protection. One important right which is legally recognised centres around informed consent.

case it's in everyone's interest that you be isolated and treated — even against your will. If you withhold consent the hospital authorities can apply for a court order to override your wishes.

Outside such exceptions, though, you have a common law right to refuse treatment — although in some states the right to refuse treatment does not include the right to refuse palliative care (such as pain relief) in hospital.

Some states have a special provision for people to refuse life-sustaining treatment, usually in the form of a written declaration made beforehand.

Can I refuse to participate in research and experiments?

While there is no law which specifically says you can refuse to participate in research and experiments, generally you have a right to say 'no' to any treatment.

In NSW the health department has a policy that a patient has the right to be informed if the treatment proposed is experimental or is to be part of medical research, and that you are entitled to refuse.

In Canada (we quote what has happened overseas because judges are always mindful of what their peers have said in previous cases), "The subject of medical experimentation is entitled to a full and frank disclosure of all the facts, probabilities and opinions which a reasonable person might be expected to consider before giving his consent."

Can I change my mind?

The courts have held that consent to one procedure doesn't authorise the undertaking of another. Merely attending a clinic or hospital for treatment or signing a consent form isn't enough to bind you, should you want to quit.

Can I leave whenever I like?

Your right to leave a health care facility is implied by your right to say 'no', and the legal right not to be falsely imprisoned. The health care facility may ask you to sign a form accepting responsibility for the consequences of refusing treatment.

Again, your right to refuse to be admitted to or to leave a hospital is qualified in the case of some infectious diseases, or if you are deemed sufficiently mentally ill to be classed as an involuntary patient, or under the care of a guardian who agrees you should be treated.

Can I refuse treatment by a particular health worker?

Again, there is no law which deals with this. Your right to refuse treatment by a particular person can probably be inferred from your right to informed consent — although if you are making a claim for compensation or a pension, you may lose your claim if you refuse to see the health worker nominated by the insurance company or government department.

Some states give patients the express right to be treated by adequately qualified health personnel. In addition, you would be on strong ground if, for example, you didn't want to be examined by a medical student.

Can I insist on being treated in private?

No law specifically says you are entitled to privacy, but it is closely related to the right of confidentiality (see overleaf), which is the legally recognised aspect of the duty owed in the health provider/consumer relationship.

If someone could overhear what was being said and could identify you, the

doctor would have difficulty in claiming confidentiality was being maintained.

The right to confidentiality

Common law has long recognised that a duty of confidence exists in the relationship between a doctor and patient. If doctors fail to keep a confidence, legal action can be taken. As far back as 1959 a patient successfully sued a doctor for negligence for revealing details of the psychiatric state of the patient to a third party.

The only health legislation which recognises a consumer's right to confidentiality beyond that afforded by common law is Victoria's, but most states do have legislation which prohibits public health officials releasing information without the patient's consent. Exceptions include:

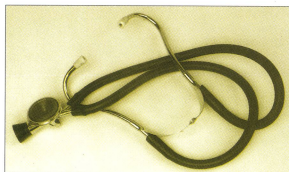
- In hospital where doctors and health workers have to discuss your case in order to determine the best treatment, or refer your case to another colleague. (You usually consent to this when you sign the consent form on admission.)
- Where health providers have to complete statutory duties such as:
 - completing death certificates
 - cancer registry notifications
 - notification of certain diseases
 - notification of child abuse.

Other exceptions include where a court orders a doctor or health worker to give evidence in court, or subpoenas medical records.

In Queensland a doctor is compelled to divulge certain information to police when there's a suspicion of a crime.

Can I determine who will be present during my treatment?

You have no specific legal right to decide who will be with you during treatment. However, if you need someone to be there so you can understand what's going on, you may have an implied right in your right to informed consent. The health care provider also has a legal right



Freedom of Information laws give patients access to their records — providing they are held by a public facility. FOI does not cover records made and held by private doctors and health workers. In states without FOI you'll have to rely on the goodwill of the health authority.

under property law to determine who may enter and stay on the premises, so the position is one of negotiation.

Your right to refuse to allow certain people to attend (a bevy of students, for instance) is probably implicit in your right to confidentiality.

Apart from rights implied by common law, NSW is the only state to publish explicit patient rights in this area.

Whose records are they, anyway?

The law in Australia recognises health records as belonging to the health professional or facility that made them. It is generally accepted that the record was simply made to assist the person who was treating you.

This is not the case with x-rays and pathology reports, however, especially where the patient or patient's health fund has paid for them.

Of course, the records can be the subject of a court subpoena or search warrant, and as a matter of common practice a health provider will normally provide a summary of what treatment has been provided, if asked.

In NSW, Victoria, SA, Queensland, Tasmania and the ACT, Freedom of Information (FOI) laws give patients access to their records — providing they are held by a public facility. FOI does not cover records made and held by private doctors and health workers. In other states you'll have to rely on the goodwill of the health authority.

Can I insist that others be consulted?

There's no law preventing you from obtaining information and advice from other sources. This right is implicit in the right to informed consent. (However, neither is there a law which says your

LEGAL REMEDIES

ACCORDING to the Consumers' Health Forum of Australia, consumers, at least theoretically, have available to them a number of ways of seeking redress. They can:

- Approach the provider directly.
- Complain to the complaints bodies, registration boards, members of parliament, ministers, the health department (see *Useful contacts, opposite*).
- Use administrative law — the ombudsman, Freedom of Information acts and

Administrative Appeals tribunals, and judicial review legislation where it exists in relation to disputes with public health officials or employees.

- Initiate proceedings under small claims, Fair Trading or Trade Practices legislation.
- Initiate civil court action if it's an insurance or contract matter.
- Report the matter to police or initiate criminal actions for assault, false imprisonment or breach of confidentiality prohibitions.

■ In the case of relatives of someone who has died in a health facility, or as a result of health services or use of a health product, take part in a coronial investigation and inquest into the death.

Very few cases get to court as many are settled beforehand.

Not only can a negligent health practitioner be sued, but if he or she is employed in a health facility, the facility itself may also be liable, both vicariously and directly.

health care worker has to consult others on your behalf.)

In WA it's an offence for a doctor to refuse a request from a patient or a relative of an incapable patient to arrange a consultation with another practitioner.

How can I seek compensation if I am injured or harmed by treatment or neglect?

You have the legal right to seek compensation through the courts, but you won't necessarily get it. You will have to prove trespass, negligence, breach of statutory duty or that you were misled or deceived regarding the quality, performance or outcomes of health service you were offered.

Compensation cases also have to be lodged within a set time of the injury — usually six years if you're taking action under common law, and three years under Trade Practices or Fair Trading legislation.

Who can I complain to?

First, if it's a hospital matter, talk to the patient representative or complaints officer. He or she can act as a mediator between both parties and smooth the way. Alternatively, write to the chief executive officer, the medical superintendent or the director of nursing, depending on the complaint. If you were treated in a health centre, talk to the co-ordinator.

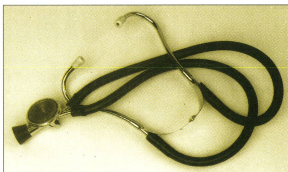
If you're not satisfied with the outcome of the meeting contact your state health department. Most state health

authorities have some sort of patient advisory service; a few have an independent health complaints unit, some of which are stronger than others. None of them, however, can grant compensation or make a legal finding. If you can't reach an agreement and still want compensation you'll probably have to go to court.

In those states without an independent complaints unit you will have to take a complaint about a private practitioner to the appropriate registration

board. Under the new Medicare agreement all states and territories should have a complaints mechanism in place by the end of 1994. See *Useful contacts* below for state-by-state details.

Consumer affairs bodies can receive and deal with complaints in relation to health services but their role is limited primarily to issues of fees. Most complaints will be referred, at least for comment, to the relevant health authorities. □



Most state health departments have some sort of patient advisory service; a few have an independent health complaints unit... None of them, however, can grant compensation or make a legal finding. If you can't reach an agreement and still want compensation you'll probably have to go to court.

USEFUL CONTACTS

ACT

Health Authority Complaints and Information Unit: (06) 205 1342.
Legal Aid ACT: (06) 243 3411.

New South Wales

Complaints Unit, NSW Health Department: (02) 219 7444.
Law Society of NSW, Community Assistance: (02) 232 2511.
Legal Aid Commission of NSW: (02) 219 5000 (or phone your local branch).

Northern Territory

Legal Aid Commission: (089) 81 4799.
NT Legal Aid Office: (089) 52 1133.

Queensland

Health Rights Commission: (07) 234 1674, 008 077 308 outside Brisbane.
Caxton Legal Centre Inc: (07) 254 1811.
Queensland Law Society: (07) 233 5888.

South Australia

Legal Services Commission, Legal Advice: (08) 205 0155;
country callers (local call fee) 008 188 126.

SA Health Commission, Health Advice and Complaints Office:
(08) 226 6011.

Tasmania

The Tasmanian Government hopes to have a Health Complaints Commissioner's office up and running sometime during 1994. In the meantime contact your regional health board if you have a complaint about a publicly funded health service. Otherwise, contact:

Australian Legal Aid Commission: (002) 34 6544.
Tasmanian Advocacy Information Service Inc: (002) 24 2240.

Victoria

Health Services Commission: (03) 670 0266.
Fitzroy Legal Service: (03) 419 3744.
Legal Aid Commission: (03) 607 0234.
Law Institute of Australia: (03) 607 9311.

WA

Complaints Officer, Health Department of WA: (09) 222 4222.
Legal Aid Commission of WA: (09) 261 6222, 008 809 616 outside Perth.
Law Society of WA: (09) 221 3222.

VIDEO GAME SYSTEMS

While the newer systems are better, if you're buying for your children the system that is most popular among their friends is probably the best choice.

ONE OF the great sources of inspiration for video games has been movies. A flick through the catalogues will find games such as *Jurassic Park*, *Terminator II*, *Rambo III* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. But if anyone needed convincing that video games themselves have stormed the popular culture marketplace then the release of a movie, *Super Mario Bros*, based on a video game would have silenced any doubters. Mario, a plumber, is the star of a number of NINTENDO games. His main rival, although the two have probably never met, is Sonic, a hedgehog whose adventures keep SEGA in business.

Video games are computer games for people without computers. The systems all have a main unit that plugs directly into your television set. The games are generally cartridges that plug into this main unit and are controlled from a separate control pad. The game cartridges aren't compatible with different systems, so if you buy a SEGA system you won't be able to play *Super Mario*. If you want to be totally cool you may have to buy a system from each manufacturer.

You can also buy handheld games, such as the SEGA Game Gear or the NINTENDO Game Boy, but they have not been included in this report.

WHICH SYSTEM IS BEST?

We tested six systems, three from SEGA, two from NINTENDO and one SNK, a

more expensive system catering more to 'big kids' with money to spend. ATARI was changing its models at the time of our trial and missed out.

Helping out with our assessments were six boys from Marrickville High School and six girls from Strathfield Girls High School, both in Sydney. Thirty people (including the twelve schoolchildren) tried out each system and gave their assessments of a number of factors such as sound quality, graphics quality and how easy the controls were to use. These were then combined into an overall score.

Not surprisingly, the most advanced systems were the most liked by our panelists and the older, more primitive systems were the least liked.

The older systems, *SEGA Master System II* and *NINTENDO NES*, run on 8-bit microprocessors, whereas the *SUPER NINTENDO* and *SEGA Mega Drive* have 16-bit processors. This increases the amount of information the system can process, so the graphics can be more lifelike and the content of the game more complex.

The SNK Neo Geo goes a step further with a 24-bit processor, increasing the amount of information that can be processed yet again. It is still not as powerful as most modern computers, which run on a 32-bit processor, but it's getting up there. The SEGA Mega-CD has a 16-bit processor but must be run with the Mega Drive, so you have two 16-bit processors

working together, further increasing the amount of information that can be processed.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Sega is a step ahead of Nintendo at the moment with its CD-ROM system, the *Mega-CD*, something Nintendo is also working on. However, in the future both companies see 'virtual reality' games as their next big products. Unlike current video games that use buttons and joysticks to control actions, virtual reality systems mimic your own actions. You might wear a special video helmet that allows you to look in any direction you like within the game or perhaps a special glove that allows your computer image to pick objects up and move them around as you would in real life. Although these games are yet to hit the arcades their distributors are hoping to have them in your homes by the end of next year.

Another innovation being looked at is having your own image recorded in the system so your character in the game looks like you. They are also working on systems that allow people in different places to play in the same game.

WHICH GAMES ARE BEST?

The most popular video games generally fall into three categories: sport, action/arcade and platform/adventure. There are also role-playing, strategy and educational games available. With each system we generally tried out one game from each of the three more popular categories.

The 'platform' or 'adventure' games were rated the best in our trial. This category includes those perennial favourites, Mario and Sonic. The main characters travel through a fantastic cartoon land collecting treasure and trying to avoid dangerous objects or characters. They move through different levels in the game (hence the 'platform' description) encountering more difficult and dangerous situations as they go. Both the adults and the schoolchildren considered these games had the best concepts and were the easiest to learn.

The action or arcade games were the

EPILEPSY

CONCERN about epilepsy and video games arose from cases where people with a certain form of epilepsy which can be brought on by flashing lights had fits after playing these games.

According to the Epilepsy Association of NSW, this form of epilepsy (called photosensitive epilepsy) is rare and probably affects one person in 10 000 in the general population. It can be contained by appropriate medication and common sense. Playing video games in a well-lit area, wearing sunglasses, not sitting too close to the screen and taking regular breaks all help. In fact these tips, apart from the sunglasses, are a good idea even if you don't have epilepsy.

If you know you have epilepsy you can still probably play video games without any ill effects, but check with your doctor beforehand. If you have experienced symptoms such as altered vision, muscle twitching or loss of awareness of your surroundings when playing a video game or watching television, you should also consult a doctor. Both Sega and Nintendo now carry warnings along these lines with their games.



The new, more advanced systems (the Sega Mega-CD and SNK Neo Geo, above) were liked best by both adults and schoolchildren in our trial, but given the cost of them and their games most people will probably prefer to go with the Sega Mega Drive or the Super Nintendo (below). (The Mega Drive pictured is the latest version — it looks different from older models but Sega claims it operates in exactly the same way; the changes are only cosmetic.)



next most popular, although opinion was clearly divided on these games. They typically involve hand-to-hand combat with a string of opponents, although war games also fall into this category. The ones we tried had names like *Street-fighter* and *Streets of Rage*. While some people thought they were excessively violent, a lot of people liked them because they could be played without too much difficulty.

The sport games (in our trial they were mostly soccer games) were the least liked. This is probably due to the limited time of our trial as much as anything else. The games are quite involved, including selecting the team, and the skill level is quite high. Many people found they couldn't get the hang of the game in the time they had playing with it. Someone

who is a devotee of both a sport and video games might quite enjoy learning how to play the game. Most sports, with the possible exceptions of underwater hockey and gumboot tossing, seem available as a video game.

Before you buy any games you may be able to try them out beforehand. Some shops have them set up so you can play the games in the shop. You can also rent games from some places. It may be worth forking out a few dollars so you can take the game home overnight and decide whether you really want to buy it or not.

SEX AND VIOLENCE

Some people have voiced concern about the violent nature of some video games. One called *Night Trap* caused an outcry this year before it even reached the shops

because of its graphic depiction of violence to women. The game used CD technology to produce 'near cinema-quality gore'. Although Sega, which has the rights to the game, decided not to release it in Australia, there was still discussion of whether it was time to apply the same censorship rules to video games as apply to films.

The relevant Commonwealth and state ministers were meeting last month (after we went to press) to decide on a classification system. They were hoping decisions could be made and legislation passed soon enough for the system to be up and running by the middle of next year.

Sega introduced its own classification system this year; it works as follows:

■ GA — General Audience, contains no graphic violence.

■ MA 13 — Mature Audience 13–17, contains cartoon violence only. For instance there should be no decapitations or blood.

■ MA 17 — Mature Audience over 17; these are the adults-only games. They contain realistic violence but no nudity, sex or racial stereotyping.

Nintendo says it doesn't have its own classification system but will comply with any system that comes out of the ministers' meeting. For the moment, though, it says the company regulates the games' content itself, and they contain no graphic depictions of death, abuse of minorities or similar. However, if you're concerned about the games your children are playing you may want to check them out yourself.

WHAT TO BUY

(in order of trialists' preference)

SEGA Mega-CD*	\$599
SNK Neo Geo	\$599
equal NINTENDO Super Nintendo	\$199
equal SEGA Mega Drive	\$199

* If you don't have a SEGA Mega Drive already you'll need to buy one to use with the Mega-CD.

Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide price checks in October 1993. Anything cheaper is a bargain.

While the SNK and SEGA Mega-CD were most liked by our trialists, they are also the most expensive systems, have the least number of games available at the moment and, in the case of the SNK, the games are very expensive as well.

If you're buying a video game system as a present for a child, you're probably better off buying the SEGA Mega Drive or SUPER NINTENDO (depending on which is more popular with your child's friends). It will then be easier (and cheaper) to swap games around among friends.

Video game systems

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Brand/model (in order of trialists' preference)	Manufacturer/distributor	System warranty	System price (\$)*	Typical game price (\$)	Number of games	Playability (%)	Sound quality (%)	Graphics quality (%)	Overall score (%)
GOOD									
SEGA Mega-CD (A)	Sega Ozi Soft	90 days	599	100-120	10-12	62	70	67	70
SNK Neo Geo	Game guys	6 months	599	170-320	30-40	55	72	70	68
OK									
NINTENDO Super Nintendo	Mattel	Lifetime	199	100-140	50	53	58	60	57
equal SEGA Mega Drive	Sega Ozi Soft	90 days	199	85-130	150-200	57	58	52	57
POOR									
NINTENDO NES	Mattel	Lifetime	99	50-90	130	43	26	28	29
SEGA Master System II	Sega Ozi Soft	90 days	99	60-80	150-200	30	16	23	19

* Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in October 1993.

(A) You also need a SEGA Mega Drive to run this system.

1 System warranty

The lifetime warranty offered by Nintendo on its systems (and games as well) means it will replace either if a fault develops, provided the fault isn't related to misuse. SNK says it will replace the games if they're faulty when you buy them, but if the game works at first and then breaks down it's probably a fault of the user. Sega offers a 30-day warranty on its games.

2 Typical game price

It has been said video game manufacturers charge as little as possible for the systems and then make their money on the games, so be aware of how much you'll have to pay for every new game. The range of prices given here is based on popular games for each system. You may be able to get older, less popular games at cheaper prices.

There are other ways of getting games on the cheap. Some stores rent them out, which lets you try a game out for a while if you're unsure about buying it, or you might just prefer a bit of variety in your games without buying lots of them. Some stores will also buy back old games when you get sick of them. If you have a group of friends with the same system you can arrange to buy different games and swap them around.

3 Number of games

These figures are based on information given to us by the manufacturers. They're a rough guide to the number of games you can buy for that system but there's no guarantee you'll be able to find that many in your local game store. Sega says it will be releasing a lot more games for the Mega-CD next year.

PERFORMANCE

The systems were assessed by 18 adults with an average age of around 30, and 12 schoolchildren from 13 to 15 years old. All the children either owned or shared systems, while only four of the adults did. More people had

There was no shortage of volunteers for this trial!



NINTENDO systems than SEGA, particularly the schoolboys. This probably had a small effect on some of the ratings but overall it didn't make a significant difference.

Each person spent a few minutes reading the instructions and familiarising themselves with the controls before playing a game on each system. After playing they filled out a questionnaire asking about the system itself and the game.

The system:

- Controls — the 'playability' of the system.
- Sound quality.
- Graphics quality.

The game:

- How easy it was to get started.
- Sufficient levels of skill for both beginners and more experienced players.
- Whether the basic idea of the game was good.

These scores were then adjusted to allow for differences in the way different people made their assessments. For example, the schoolchildren were much more likely to rate the systems as very good or very bad whereas the adults were more conservative in their scoring. A statistical analysis was performed to determine whether the differences between the systems' scores were significant, and this analysis was used to split the systems into three camps, those that were 'good', 'OK' and 'poor'. Because we only tried three games on each system we didn't include the panelists' ratings of the games in the overall score.

4 Playability

This is an assessment of how well the controls related to the movement of the characters. In some games, for example, the same button would perform a number of different actions, depending on the situation, which some people might find confusing. The adults rated the SNK higher than the schoolchildren, and among the school students there was a tendency for the girls to prefer the SEGA controls and the boys to prefer those on NINTENDO. This is probably a result of familiarity with different systems.

5 Sound quality

When it came to sound quality, the SNK and SEGA Mega-CD were popular with kids and adults alike. There was a significant difference between the adults and schoolchildren when it came to the SUPER NINTENDO, where the kids rated the sound quality best of all the systems and the adults considered it fairly average. It's possible the style of music and sound effects on this system appeal more to some tastes than others.

6 Graphics quality

The graphics were noticeably worse on the two older systems and were rated as such. Once again the schoolkids rated the SUPER NINTENDO up the top with the SNK, while the adults were less enthusiastic about its graphics. One of our adult trialists who is colourblind had difficulty with the NINTENDO systems because the shades of the different colours were too similar.

7 Overall score

This is a combination of the ratings for the three questions relating to the system (playability, sound quality and graphics quality). Although the three factors are weighted equally, because of the statistical corrections the overall score is not a simple average of the three component scores in the table.

READ ALL ABOUT IT!



PAPERBACK NOVEL

James Clavell's *Shogun* or Jeffrey Archer's *Honour Among Thieves*

Denmark	23
Chile	20
New Zealand	20
Spain	20
Germany	19
Indonesia	18
Ireland	17
Netherlands	16
Australia	15
Singapore	15
Austria	14
Hong Kong	14
Italy	13
South Korea	13
UK	12
USA	11

NEWSPAPER

'Quality' daily

Austria	2.03
Ireland	1.90
Switzerland	1.85
Denmark	1.74
Germany	1.71
Italy	1.30
Spain	1.19
USA	1.19
UK	1.14
Belgium	1.12
Chile	1.05
Hong Kong	0.99
Australia	0.70
South Korea	0.57
New Zealand	0.51
Singapore	0.48

MAGAZINE

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Singapore	5.60
Denmark	5.60
Germany	5.50
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Netherlands	5.00
Austria	4.90
USA	4.50
Italy	4.30
UK	4.30
Chile	3.80
Ireland	3.80
Australia	3.50
New Zealand	3.40
Indonesia	2.70

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* New subscribers

All prices are in Australian dollars, based on exchange rates quoted in the *Australian Financial Review*, September 15, 1993.

KEEPING THE ODD DROP COOL

The beer's nicely chilled, you think — but when you get to the barbie and take it out of the cooler you find it's now lukewarm. What kind of small cooler should you buy to avoid similar disappointment? Our test tells all.

YOU'VE HEARD of a medley of tunes and a medley of fruits — well, for this report we decided to test a medley of small coolers.

By 'small' we mean a cooler that takes approximately a six-pack or two wine bottles, while 'medley' describes the fact that we ended up with a great variety of products — soft bag chillers, foam or hard-bodied coolers including a typical foam six-pack cooler and a small hard-bodied cooler (in fact an ESKY), an Australia Post POSTPAK polystyrene container (normally used to post a bottle of wine) and an insulated soft bag, of the type typically sold in supermarkets for carrying cold groceries home.

In all we found ourselves with 13 products for testing: all the soft bag-shaped small coolers available at the time, all the hard-bodied ones designed to hold two wine bottles and a few others for comparison. Each met a basic criterion — that is, a product intended for use or that might be used as a way of keeping a few wines, beers or soft drinks cool on the way to and perhaps at the beach, picnic,



restaurant or wherever. The table below gives the details of what we bought.

THE TESTS

Tests were designed to assess the coolers in three areas: how cool they kept drinks, how convenient they were to use and their durability. For the first of these, several tests were involved, with the coolers being trialled using a couple of

different loads of cans and/or bottles (including each cooler's claimed maximum load), in conditions simulating a warm car boot and in the direct sun, with the addition of an ice brick and without.

THE RESULTS

Results in these tests for keeping drinks cool covered a wide range, from very good through to poor. Worst was the

Soft coolers

Brand/model (in rank order)	Type	Manufacturer/distributor	Origin	Price* (\$)	Warranty	Leaked
DÉCOR Soft Chiller 6-Pack Plus (A)	Soft bag	Décor	China	15.90	'Lifetime' (D)	No
ESKY Snackmate	Typical hard cooler	Nylex	Australia	18.30	3 years	No
ARCTIC Mini 6 Litre	Typical foam cooler	Valuca	Australia	2.45	Not provided	No
DÉCOR Soft Chiller 2 bottle (A)	Soft bag	Décor	China	15.85	'Lifetime' (D)	No
FRIJ The Frij (B)	Soft bag	Brava	Australia	12.95	Not provided	Yes
FRIJ The Big Frij (B)	Soft bag	Brava	Australia	19.95	Not provided	Yes
AIRPORT BYO	Soft bag	Airport Luggage Australia	China	15.00	Not provided	Yes
DÉCOR BYO Wine Cooler	Hard box	Décor	Australia	19.85	'Lifetime' (D)	No
WILLOW 6 Can Soft Cooler (C)	Soft bag	Willow Ware	China	11.60	1 year	No
ARCTIC Plastic 2-Bottle	Hard box	Valuca	Australia	6.95	Not provided	No
ARCTIC Foam 2-Bottle	Foam box	Valuca	Australia	3.15	Not provided	No

* Price paid in mid 1993.

(A) Models introduced in late 1993 with welded inner seams; these are better than earlier models because they don't leak, so check the seams when you're buying in case there's old stock still around.

(B) These items have been superseded by the Frij Frij and the Big Frij Frij, which claim to have better thermal insulation, but the models we tested may still be available in stores.

(C) A newer model has some improved durability/ease-of-use features but performance should be similar.

(D) 'Lifetime': Décor says, "Décor products are guaranteed for the life of the products, provided they are used for the purpose for which they were designed. Any product showing a manufacturing defect will be replaced by Décor with the same or equivalent product."

(E) Included when purchased.

(F) Not included when purchased.

insulated supermarket bag — judging from its results, nothing more taxing should be asked of it than getting frozen groceries home from the supermarket without thawing (and after all, that's about all it's meant to do).

Then there were a number of ordinary performers, a mixture of cooler types among them — soft bag, hard box and foam box. Cooler type seemed to have little to do with whether a model kept the drinks cool or not.

Some of the small coolers tested are designed to take only cans, while some are better for bottles and some are fine for either. Accordingly, which of the top performers you'd buy might depend primarily on whether you mostly want to carry cans or bottles. But one of the recommended models, the DÉCOR Soft Chiller 6-Pack Plus, is unusually versatile, coping with wine bottles, soft drink bottles, stubbies, cans or even a 4L cask (see its profile overleaf for other details).

As you might expect, the products remained ranked in much the same order for all the performance tests. Those which did best in the 'car boot' test also came out top when tested in direct sunlight, while those which performed worst were last again. The best were still the best and the worst the worst regardless of how much was in them and whether or not an ice brick was included.

All the coolers in the *What to buy* list could be expected to keep their contents cool for at least five hours in heat of up to 45°C, as long as you use an ice brick (we found in that heat and over that many hours, using an ice brick can keep

a couple of bottles of wine or a few cans up to 10°C cooler). The POSTPAK is also a good performer, though you can't use an ice brick with it. Exactly how cold the drinks are when you unpack them will depend on how many you've put in there (the more there are the colder they'll keep), how cold they were when you packed them and the temperature of your cooler's surroundings.

EASE OF USE

With ease of use, the different types of cooler have their own advantages and disadvantages, it emerged. The big questions were how easy are the coolers to load and unload, to close and carry, and to clean and store. Briefly, we found soft coolers the easiest to store and hard-bodied ones the easiest to clean; the box-shaped hard-bodied and foam ones were easiest to load and unload but also the most uncomfortable to carry for any distance.

Beyond that, ease of use became a matter of each product's individual design. The lift-off lids with locks built into the handles of the ESKY Snackmate and DÉCOR BYO Wine Cooler rated well, as did the soft webbing handles of the other two DÉCOR models. The drawstring necks and beanbag-type thermal insulation of the two FRIJ models made them the most problematic to pack, and they also had uncomfortable handles. Overall, they rated lowest for ease of use, along with the ARCTIC Mini 6 Litre, which scored poorly because its lid was difficult to grasp for removal and, like the FRIJs, it had an uncomfortable handle.

DURABILITY

Here again, differences emerged according to type. The foam coolers performed worst, basically being destroyed anew at each stage of testing (body strength, handle strength and scratch/abrasion test — though the Australia Post POSTPAK, which doesn't have a handle, was left out of the second of these). The soft coolers were much better survivors, with four soft bag models (two DÉCORS and two FRIJs) proving most durable overall.

THE FINAL PICTURE

The two DÉCOR soft bags came out best overall. Equally good or even better in terms of keeping drinks cool were the ESKY Snackmate hard-sided cooler, included as typical of this type, and the ARCTIC Mini 6 Litre, a typical foam cooler (though of course other representatives of those types won't perform exactly the same).

The two DÉCOR soft coolers hold both bottles and cans and even a cask, while the ESKY and ARCTIC Mini 6 Litre are designed mainly for cans (see the table for details of what each the coolers will hold).

WHAT TO BUY

DÉCOR Soft Chiller 6-Pack Plus	\$15.90
ESKY Snackmate	\$18.30
ARCTIC Mini 6 Litre	\$2.45
DÉCOR Soft Chiller 2-bottle	\$15.85

Prices shown are what we paid in mid 1993.

2	Brand/model (in rank order)
	DÉCOR Soft Chiller 6-Pack Plus(A)
	ESKY Snackmate
	ARCTIC Mini 6 Litre
	DÉCOR Soft Chiller 2-bottle (A)
	FRIJ The Frij (B)
	FRIJ The Big Frij (B)
	AIRPORT BYO
	DÉCOR BYO Wine Cooler
	WILLOW 6 Can Soft Cooler (C)
	ARCTIC Plastic 2-Bottle
	ARCTIC Foam 2-Bottle

What they hold

flask or 3x1.25L soft drink bottles or 2-3 wine bottles or 10 cans.	Yes (E)
cans or 2L cask	Yes (F)
cans or 1x1.25L soft drink bottle	No
cask or 2x1.25L soft drink bottles or 2 wine bottles or 6 cans	Yes (E)
cask or 3 wine bottles (necks stick out) or 1.25L soft drink bottles or 6 cans	No
cask or 3x1.25L soft drink bottles or 4 wine bottles (necks stick out) or 11 cans (a tight fit)	No
cask or 5 wine bottles or 3x1.25L soft drink bottles or 12 cans	No
wine bottles or 2x1.25L soft drink bottles or 5 cans	Yes (E)
cans or 2L cask	No
wine bottles or 2x1.25L soft drink bottles or 5 cans	No
wine bottles or 2x1.25L soft drink bottles or 5 cans	No

1

What they hold

The coolers hold these things as well as an ice brick, either the special one made for the cooler or a standard one.

2

Keeping cool

The coolers are ranked primarily on their scores for keeping drinks cool, with durability and ease of use scores also taken into account. We didn't include the POSTPAK or the insulated shopping bag in the table because they're not really intended for use as coolers, which meant some of the tests couldn't be fairly applied to them.

DÉCOR Soft Chiller 6-Pack Plus



ARCTIC Mini 6-Litre



FRIJ The Frij



ESKY Snackmate



DÉCOR Soft Chiller 2-Bottle



FRIJ The Big Frij

PROFILES

Models are listed in rank order. Prices shown are what we paid in mid 1993.

DÉCOR Soft Chiller 6-Pack Plus

Type: Soft bag

Price: \$15.90

Summary: Very good at keeping drinks cool. Comfortable handle, easy to open and close and to load. The most versatile cooler, taking bottles, a large cask, cans, as well as the freeze flask supplied. Passed all durability tests. Did not leak. Lining can be pulled to the outside for easier cleaning.

ESKY Snackmate

Type: Small hard-sided cooler

Price: \$18.30

Summary: Very good at keeping drinks cool. Comfortable handle, easy to open and close, with a good locking system. Easy to load and clean. Handle pulled free in the handle strength test but could easily be replaced. Did not leak.

ARCTIC Mini 6-Litre

Type: Typical foam box cooler

Price: \$2.45

Summary: Very good at keeping drinks cool. Uncomfortable handle; difficult to grasp lid when removing it. Easy to load and to clean. Poor durability—failed body strength, handle strength and abrasion tests. Did not leak.

DÉCOR Soft Chiller 2-Bottle

Type: Soft bag

Price: \$15.85

Summary: Good at keeping drinks cool. Comfortable handle, easy to open and close and to load. Passed all durability tests. Did not leak. Lining can be pulled to the outside for easier cleaning.

FRIJ The Frij

Type: Soft bag

Price: \$12.95

Summary: Good at keeping drinks cool. Uncomfortable handle, awkward to load — and the necks of wine bottles stick out. Easy to open and close. Fairly easy to clean. Passed all durability tests. Leaked.

FRIJ The Big Frij

Type: Soft bag

Price: \$19.95

Summary: Good at keeping drinks cool. Uncomfortable handle, awkward to load — and the necks of wine bottles stick out. Easy to open and close. Fairly easy to clean. Passed all durability tests. Leaked.

AIRPORT BYO



WILLOW 6 Can Soft Cooler



DÉCOR BYO Wine Cooler



ARCTIC Foam 2-Bottle



ARCTIC Plastic 2-Bottle



Insulated soft supermarket bag



POSTPAK



AIRPORT BYO

Type: Soft bag

Price: \$15.00

Summary: Fair at keeping drinks cool. Comfortable handle. Easy to open and close and to load. Limited access, and seams and dark-coloured interior made cleaning a little difficult. Stitching started to tear in handle strength test (but not a major problem). Leaked.

DÉCOR BYO Wine Cooler

Type: Hard box

Price: \$19.85

Summary: Fair at keeping drinks cool. Comfortable handle, easy to open and close, with a good locking system. Easy to load, easy to clean. Outer body cracked during body strength test but the cooler was still usable. Did not leak.

WILLOW 6 Can Soft Cooler

Type: Soft bag

Price: \$11.60

Summary: Fair at keeping drinks cool. Comfortable handle, which can be used as a shoulder strap. Easy to open and close and to load. Fairly easy to clean. Abrasion test caused minor damage.

ARCTIC Plastic 2-Bottle

Type: Hard box

Price: \$6.95

Summary: Fair at keeping drinks cool. Uncomfortable handle, easy to open and close but lid can fall off easily. Easy to load, easy to clean. Body strength test caused some damage. Did not leak.

ARCTIC Foam 2-Bottle

Type: Foam box

Price: \$3.15

Summary: Fair at keeping drinks cool. Uncomfortable handle, easy to open and close but lid can fall off easily. Easy to load, easy to clean. Poor durability — failed body strength, handle strength and abrasion tests. Did not leak.

SPECIAL CASES

These two products were included in the test because they seemed to have some aspects in common with drinks coolers, although that's not what they're designed to be.

POSTPAK

Type: Australia Post foam container

Price: \$2.40

Summary: As good at keeping drinks cool as the best of the other bottle coolers. Not designed as a cooler so problems with ease of use — no room for ice or ice bricks, no handle, lid is difficult to grasp when removing it. Easy to load. Limited access and internal ribbing make it difficult to clean. Poor durability, as might be expected from what's basically just a foam box. Did not leak. Essentially it's a great last resort on a hot day.

Insulated soft supermarket bag

Price: \$8.00

Summary: The bag we tested of this type was poor at keeping drinks cool for any length of time — stick to using it for bringing frozen groceries home from shopping. Being essentially a plastic bag it's easy to use and clean but may not last long — ours failed the handle strength test and scratched easily.



LETTERS

Send your letters to **CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204**. Where possible, please include your daytime telephone number, as we may wish to contact you direct for more information or to discuss your comments and queries.

PLUMBERS' PRICES

Dripping taps waste water, which our Water Board will soon have us paying for directly. But which is cheaper — a few kilolitres of water or a visit from the plumber?

Recently my plumber changed his method of calculating his charge for labour, without telling me. The actual job — changing five tap washers — took 25 minutes and that included a return visit to the van to answer a radiophone call. When the invoice arrived the charge for labour was \$60, a rate of \$144 per hour! I telephoned to query the labour charge and was informed (for the first time) that a flat charge of \$60 applied for the first hour or any lesser period and that I would have been informed of this when requesting service.

The latter was untrue and I have been deprived of the opportunity of:

- Having the plumber work for the rest of the hour changing every washer in sight, or
- Choosing another plumber.

I do not willingly pay for service I have not received and my refusal to pay this exorbitant labour charge (I cut it in half) stirred the plumber to retaliation. I received a phone call from a solicitor engaged to act on his behalf. With the explicit threat of a court summons in place, a compromise was agreed to — split the difference. So the plumber has received two cheques from me this month but he will not be asked to do a job for me ever again.

How can situations like this be avoided? My advice to readers wishing to engage a plumber or any other tradesperson is to ask explicitly about time thresholds and minimum charges, find out whether there is an extra loading for travel and beware of anyone who seriously expects you to pay within seven days — the end of the month will do nicely, thank you, when the work has been tested.

D R Murray
Gwynneville, NSW

Finding a good tradesperson in our July issue also has advice on questions to ask before your plumber, electrician, painter or builder starts work.

LOGGING NATIVE FORESTS

I was extremely disappointed to read the quiz item on saving the forests (*The CHOICE Enviro-challenge*, May 1993). CHOICE appears to have opted for its own version of political 'correctness' over genuinely independent and accurate advice to consumers.

The greatest threat to Australian forests is clearing wood for development, not management practices associated with sustainable wood production. Much of our 32 million hectares of public forest exists today because it was saved in state forests and timber reserves. Its value in supplying wood products in perpetuity protected it from competing land uses. Consumers should be aware that today Australian forest agencies manage wood production activities on a sustainable basis.

CHOICE has misled its readers by advising there is "plenty of pine from plantations available". Plantations produce only about one third of Australian wood consumption. Encouraging consumers to reject products from sustainably managed Australian forests will either increase imports or the use of alternative building products. Neither action can be supported on environmental grounds.

There is ample evidence that manufactured products are more harmful to the environment than natural products such as wood. Environmental impacts occur during the extraction of the raw materials of all building products. For most materials, processing impacts are greater than those associated with timber processing in terms of energy use, greenhouse gas and other emissions, effluents and solid wastes. Even when factors such as lifespan and maintenance are taken into account the superiority of timber on environmental grounds is upheld.

The source of all this information is the 1992 Resource Assessment Commission's *Forest and Timber Inquiry*, arguably the most comprehensive and independent inquiry ever held into Australia's forests.

C Bongers
Queensland Timber Board

TELECOM OR AUSTEL?

I refer to the *Choice Cut* on page 4 of the June 1993 issue that begins, "Telecom is planning to change your phone number...". Is it possible that the staff of your magazine is unaware that Telecom is planning no such thing? The perpetrator of this action is Austel — the government's so-called watchdog of the communications industry. Ultimately it may be Telecom which performs the number changes but the planning rests fairly and squarely on the shoulders of Austel.

R D Semtner
Carindale, Qld

You're quite correct. Austel took over responsibility for telephone numbering from Telecom in 1991.

LEFT-HANDED HAZARDS

I work in the safety industry and often use articles from your magazine as a guide. After reading your test report *Impact drills for DIY use* I noticed there was no mention of the trigger lock-on switch.

A problem exists with most electrical hand tools, not just impact drills, with the location of the lock-on button. All left-handed people will recognise a problem as the button is on the palm grip, therefore easily engaging the locked mode with normal use. This can be a dangerous practice, especially during drilling.

I have actually witnessed an accident where an operator was using a drill, the drill 'grabbed' and because of the accidental engaging of the lock-on button the drill was pulled out of the operator's hand and continued to turn. This did not last for long, however, because the flex wrapped around the chuck tightly and shorted out. Apart from a very sore arm no one was seriously injured but a hazard certainly exists.

Consideration should be given by the manufacturer for the significant number of left-handed people.

J Hugo
Cessnock, NSW



WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

- 1 Which of the following countries has been fastest to embrace the concept of fuzzy logic technology?
 - A) The United States
 - B) Australia
 - C) Japan
- 2 The inventor of fuzzy logic, Lotfi Zadeh, lives and works in which of the following countries?
 - A) The United States
 - B) Australia
 - C) Japan
- 3 Which of the following identification documents would not be accepted by a bank if you were opening a new account?
 - A) Union membership card
 - B) Business card
 - C) Driver's licence
 - D) Birth certificate
- 4 If you are injured as a result of goods you've purchased, what do you have to prove in order to claim damages from the manufacturer?
 - A) That you did not cause the injury by using the goods in the wrong way.
 - B) That the manufacturer was negligent in the way it made the goods.
 - C) That the goods had a defect.
- 5 Sole traders and businesses operating as partnerships generally fall *outside* the jurisdiction of which of the following consumer protection laws?
 - A) Fair Trading Acts
 - B) Trade Practices Act
 - C) Sale of Goods Acts
- 6 Which level of government in Australia usually has responsibility for overseeing the regulation of trade and commerce?
 - A) Local government
 - B) State government
 - C) Commonwealth government

ANSWERS

1. C. It is estimated that the United States is now about six years behind Japan in the development and application of fuzzy logic technology. The obvious consumer appeal of products like one-button washing machines that automatically select the appropriate cycle for your wash is enabling Japan to swallow up markets for the technology in America.

2. A. Ironically, Lotfi Zadeh lives and works in America. He invented fuzzy logic back in 1964, but although the technology has been embraced by the Japanese, it is still largely ignored and discredited by the American scientific community.

3. A and B. The identification documents you present must add up to 100 points. Birth certificates and passports are worth 70 points each, your driver's licence is worth 40.

4. C. Under new laws which came into operation in July 1992 about unsafe goods, it is not necessary to prove that the manufacturer was negligent. You only have to prove that the goods have a defect — that is, that their safety is not such as people generally are entitled to expect. The laws only cover goods sold after July 1992. A manufacturer is not liable if the defect didn't exist when the goods were first supplied.

5. B. The Trade Practices Act is valid in relation to companies, not to people operating without a company structure, as a sole trader or partnership. Consumers can seek redress against sole traders and partnerships through state Fair Trading laws. Most states have also amended old Sale of Goods Acts to incorporate modern consumer protection provisions.

6. C — though state governments have some powers.



RECALLS AND BANS

If you find a recall or ban not on our list please let us know.

565 g CANS OF ADMIRAL BRAND LYCHEES (batch no. Q388, product of Taiwan) have been recalled by the distributor as analysis has shown the fruit and syrup contain tin levels above the maximum permitted by the Food Standards Code. Do not eat.

Barton Addison and Sons has recalled 375 g **HOMEBRAND SMOOTH PEANUT BUTTER** (use-by date 6/5/94) and 375 g **BLACK AND GOLD SMOOTH PEANUT BUTTER** (use-by date 5/5/94) as samples have contained mould. Do not eat. Return to retailer.

Bertolli Australia has recalled 600 mL **BOTTLES OF BERTOLLI PROVISTA SUGO ITALIAN COOKING SAUCE** (code prefix 'LE' on lid) as foreign matter may have entered the product. Do not eat. Return to retailer for refund.

BMW Australia has recalled **BMW MOTORCYCLES 1989-1992** (central steering lock model only) as the ignition/steering lock bolts may be-

come loose following the application of excessive force (eg the cycle falls over). Affected models are:

K1 (frame range from 6 372 001 to 6 378 067), **K100 RS** (from 0 200001 to 0 206 565 and from 6 405 001 to 6 410 000) and **K1100 LT** (from 6 455 001 to 6 458 997). Contact your nearest BMW dealer to arrange inspection.

Clark Rubber has recalled **AUGUSTA ROSE GREEN CAST IRON PATIO CHAIR** (with lace/rose style back and seat) as the chair legs may collapse where they connect to the underside of the seat. Do not use. Return to retailer for refund.

Herb Valley has recalled **HERB VALLEY RASPBERRY LEAF TABLETS 300 mg** (batch no. 12271) as samples have been found to contain *Escherichia coli* and *Clostridium perfringens* bacteria. Do not eat.

Repec Cycle Co and **Apollo Bicycle Co** have recalled **REPCO** and **APOLLO MEN'S RACING BICYCLES** (sold between September 1992 and September 1993) as the structural integrity of

the frame is in doubt. Affected models are: **REPCO SUPERLITE 1992/93** (all frame sizes, colours vivid purple, neon red/yellow/blue), **APOLLO VITESSE 1992/93** (21", 23", 25" frame sizes, deep purple colour), **APOLLO CONCORDE 1992/93** (23" frame, metallic black colour) and **APOLLO ECLIPSE 1993/94** (all frame sizes, screaming yellow colour). Do not ride. Return to retailer for inspection.

Tip Top Bakeries has recalled **TIP TOP HARVEST BREAD** — 900 g **LOAF**, **TIP TOP CONTINENTAL BREADS**: **RYE 450 g**, **WURZBURGER 450 g** and **900 g**, **DREIZEHN RYE 900 g**, **SWEET SOUR SLICED 450 g** and **UNSLICED 900 g**, **BAVARIAN LANDBROT UNSLICED 450 g** and **900 g**, **HOLSTEINER SCHROTBROT SLICED 450 g** and **UNSLICED 900 g**, **BLACK RYE SLICED 450 g** and **UNSLICED 900 g**, and **RYE SLICED 900 g**, baked between Monday, September 13 and Monday, September 20, 1993, as the bread may contain foreign matter. Do not eat. Dispose of bread and, for refund, send wrapper and plastic date clip to **Tip Top Bakeries**, 51 Alleyne Street, Chatswood 2067.

TWELVE MONTH INDEX

JANUARY — DECEMBER 1993

(T) test

(D) includes assessment of suitability for those with disabilities

(F) feature — general advice

(M) feature — includes market information

(S) subscriber survey or user trial

(C) Consumer in law

(L) letter

(U) update of previous report

* additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items

Air quality, indoor	Jan(F), Mar*	Flame-retardant spray	Sep(T)	Paint, exterior	Jun(T)
Alternative medicine	Oct (F)	Food		Pasta, 'fresh'	Jul(T)
Antibiotics	Aug(F)	cheese, brie	Dec(S,T)	Patients' rights	Dec(C)
Appliances		fruit substitutes for kids	Mar(T)	Perfume	May(T)
small 'disposable'	Oct (F)	grains and cereals	Jun(F)	Printers, computer	Mar(T)
Asthma management	May(F)	packaged meals for kids	Feb(M)	Product recalls and bans	May(C)
Audio equipment		pasta, 'fresh'	Jul(T)	Property, investing in	Jul(F)
CD players, multi-disc	Mar(T)	Garden hoses	Nov(T)	Recycling	Apr(F)
digital recording	Jun(M)	Gas heaters, flued	Apr(T,D)	Reduced-alcohol beer	Apr(T)
Australian-made labelling	Jan(F)	Glues	Jul(M)	Refrigerators	
Barbecues, kettle	Jan(T)	Grains and cereals	Jun(F)	350-400 litre	May (T)
Batteries, car	Sep(T)	Hair and hair products	Jan(F)	Renewable energy sources	Sep(F)
Beer, reduced-alcohol	Apr(T)	Heaters, gas flued	Apr(T,D)	Renovating, energy-efficient	Oct(F)
Bicycles, hybrid	Aug(T,S)	Heating, home	May(F)	Savings plans	Mar(F)
Breast cancer	Jan(F)	High chairs	Jul(T,D)	Security screen doors	Sep(F)
Buying a used car	Oct(F)	Hiring tradespeople	Jul(F), Nov*, Dec(L)	Sewing machines	Apr(T,D)
Buying guide, annual	Dec	Home heating	May (F)	Shade materials	Jan(F)
Cameras, compact	Feb(T)	House and contents insurance	Oct (M)	Shampoo vacuum cleaners	May(T,D)
Cars		Hybrid bikes	Aug(T,S)	Slimming programs	Jun(M)
batteries	Sep(T)	Impact drills	Aug(T,D), Dec(L)	Sun protection	Jan(F)
buying used	Oct (F)	Index, four-year	Jun	Superannuation guarantee	Feb(F), Jul*
child restraints	Apr(M)	Indoor air quality	Jan(F), Mar*	Supermarket survey	Jul(S)
clamping and tow-away	Feb(C)	Insulation	Apr(F)	Supermarket trading terms	Jun(F)
CD players, multi-disc	Mar(T)	Insurance		Tax, rights and obligations	Mar(C)
Cheese, brie	Dec(S,T)	claims	Aug(C)	Telecommunications	Feb(M)
Child car restraints	Apr(M)	complaints schemes	Oct (F)	Telephone, harassment by	Oct(C)
Childcare questionnaire	Nov	house and contents	Oct (M)	Telephones	Nov(T)
Cigarettes, low-tar	Aug(T)	life	Sep(M), Dec	Televisions	
Clothes labelling	Apr(C)	Investing in property	Jul(F)	pocket-sized	May(T)
Cockroaches, getting rid of	Nov(T)	Labelling		portable	Apr(T,D)
Computer printers	Mar(T)	Australian-made	Jan(F)	Vacuum cleaners	
Coolers, small, for drinks	Dec(T)	clothes	Apr(C)	medium-priced	Oct(T,D)
Cosmetics, animal testing	Mar(M)	Laundry detergents	Mar(T)	shampoo	May(T,D)
Credit cards	Feb(F)	Lawnmowers, petrol	Nov(T)	Video game systems	Dec(S)
Debt harassment	Jul(C)	Life insurance	Sep(M), Dec*	Video recorders	Mar(T)
Dental care	Dec(F)	Light bulbs, long-life	Jun(T)	Vitamins and minerals	Sep(F)
Detergents, laundry	Mar(T)	Low-tar cigarettes	Aug(T)	Wall ovens, electric	Jun(T,D)
Digital recording	Jun(M)	Mattresses	Aug(M), Oct*		Oct(U,T,D), Nov*
Dishwashers	Feb(T,D), Nov(U,T,D)	Medicine, alternative	Oct (F)	Washing machines	Jan(T,D), Mar*, Sep(T,D)
Drills, impact	Aug(T,D), Dec(L)	Minerals and vitamins	Sep(F)	Water filters	Feb(T), Sep(U)
Drinks coolers, small	Dec(T)	Mortgage switching	Nov(F)	Water heaters	Aug(T,S), Nov*
Energy, renewable	Sep(F)	Nappies	Nov(M)	Weight loss programs	Jun(M)
Environment quiz	May(F), Dec(L)	Ovens, electric wall	Jun(T,D)	Wine, two-litre casks	Dec(T,S)
Exterior paint	Jun(T)		Oct(U,T,D), Nov*		